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ABSTRACT

Written by selected faculty members associated with the adoptions training project of the University of Southern California, the eight papers in this collection reflect the content of intensive, short-term educational programs for administrators, supervisors, and workers employed in adoption services. Individual papers provide an introduction to contemporary adoption services, focusing particularly on (1) adoption in America as it has evolved over the last century and the place and purpose of adoption within the contemporary concept of child welfare service, (2) themes associated with separation and loss and the way adoption is experienced developmentally in relationship to life events of the birth parent, adoptive parent, and adopted child (with implications for adoption services), (3) Anglo and Indian concepts of child development and considerations for placing American Indian children, (4) adoption services in the Mexican American community, (5) discriminatory practices in awarding children for adoption to unmarried individuals, (6) the impact of legal decisions and trends on the traditional role of adoption workers, (7) role functions and basic responsibilities for collaboration among professionals involved in the adoption process, and (8) the role of adoption workers as organizational change agents in agency settings. (RH)

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The School of Social Work

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SPECIAL EDITION
Contemporary Perspectives on Adoptions

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THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
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SPECIAL EDITION

CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON ADOPTIONS

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Editorial Notes

During the past fifteen years there have been a number of major changes in social work practice and social work theory. This is especially true in the area of adoptions. Until recently, adoptions services were segregated administratively from other child welfare programs and gave highest priority to the placement of healthy white infants into economically privileged white homes. Adoptive parents were expected to reimburse adoption agencies for the full cost of services received.

A decrease in the number of "blue-ribbon" babies available for adoption, and increased public awareness of the very large number of dependent children who do not fit the stereotype of the white, healthy infant considered "suitable" for adoption, have forced adoption agencies to establish new priorities, to revise their policies, and to develop new forms of practice. The priority today is the development of permanent family placements for those most in need: minority group children, those of mixed parentage, those who are no longer infants, and those who have emotional, behavioral, or physical disabilities. The magnitude of the changes in the types of children placed is evidenced in the adoption statistics of the Los Angeles County Department of Adoptions. In 1967, twenty-nine percent of those placed for adoption were labeled "hard-to-reach" children; ten years later, in 1977, children carrying such a label represented 76 percent of all those placed for adoption.

Adoption workers have responded creatively to these changes. Programs have been developed to educate potential adoptive parents about the gratifications as well as the challenges involved in rearing "hard-to-place" children; new knowledge and skills have been developed for working with these children and their families. The dissemination of this new knowledge has been uneven, however, and there has been recognition of the need to develop educational programs that provide opportunities for workers and administrators to update their knowledge.

In 1975, these needs led the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation to fund, on a temporary basis, child-placement training programs. The University of Southern California School of Social Work, along with Columbia University and the University of Michigan, was invited to develop intensive, short-term educational programs for administrators, supervisors, and workers currently employed in adoptions services. The programs of these three universities were coordinated by the North American Center on Adoptions, a division of the Child Welfare League of America.

During its three years of operation, the University of Southern California's adoptions training project was fortunate to have three able child-welfare experts as administrators: John G. Milner, Carol W. Williams, and

Marie Weil. The impact of the program has been large: it has trained 103 adoptions personnel from nineteen states, Canada and Israel.

The reception given the program has been enthusiastic, evaluations by participants have been highly positive, and many suggestions were made that the content presented in the seminars should be made available to child welfare personnel who could not participate in the formal training sessions. With encouragement and financial support from the Edna McConnell Clark Fund, selected faculty from the 1978-79 project were invited to write papers for this special edition of *Social Work Papers*. Together, these papers provide an excellent introduction to contemporary adoptions services. Included are topics such as the historical development of adoption services, recommendations on how adoption services can be integrated into a comprehensive program of family-oriented practice, knowledge of current impediments to the adoption of "hard-to-place" children, the impact of legal decisions and trends upon adoptions practice, interprofessional relations, and a philosophy of practice which will facilitate the development of permanent homes for "hard-to-place" children.

These papers should serve as valuable resource documents for child welfare students and experienced child welfare workers. It is hoped that they receive the dissemination and utilization they deserve.

Robert W. Roberts
Editor

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ADOPTION: ITS PLACE AND PURPOSE IN A CONTEMPORARY CONCEPT OF CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

By
June Brown
Associate Professor of Social Work

From social work's inception, it has accepted the problems experienced by troubled families and dependent children as matters of professional concern and the development of methods to alleviate these problems as part of the professional responsibility. Child placement in foster and adoptive homes was among the early forms of individualized services for dependent children and the basis of the development of child welfare as a field of social work practice. Traditionally, adoption has been the preferred option among the child welfare services, but in recent years the number of adoptive placements by social agencies has declined notably, and many adoption agencies are seeking new and different service functions.[1] This paper looks at American adoption as it has evolved over the last 100 years or so in order to share some thoughts about its place and purpose in a contemporary concept of child welfare services.

American Adoption: An historical sketch

The Law of Adoption

Adoption is an old social practice, universally known to both simple and complex societies, and its occurrence is recorded as far back as biblical and classical times. To adopt comes from the Latin *adoptare*, which means to consider, to look at, to choose; in this sense, the purpose of adoption among the ancient Romans was to secure an heir to strengthen or extend a family-line. In the Anglo-Saxon tradition, however, adoption did not exist; neither the right to adopt nor the right to be adopted was known to English Common Law. Some have attributed this omission to the fact that English law recognized the rights of parents but accorded no rights to children, not even the right of inheritance. Others suggest that the absence of adoptions in the Common Law may be more accurately explained as a reflection of the English norm, shared across class lines, that heirs were only legitimate children of the actual bloodline.[2]

Inasmuch as American jurisprudence derives from the English system of laws, American law operated well into the 19th century with the same ommission. When adoption was established in the United States, it was purely a creation of statute.[3] Having evolved from those statutes, American adoption in the modern sense is the socio-legal process by which the parent-child relationship is established between persons petitioning to

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[1]Alfred Kadushin, "Child Welfare: Adoption and Foster Care," *Encyclopedia of Social Work* I (1978), p. 120.
[2]S. B. Presser, "The Historical Background of the American Law of Adoption," *Journal of Family Law*, II (1972): 448.
[3]The first law of adoption in the U.S. to reflect socio-legal concepts was enacted in Massachusetts in 1851.

adopt. The subject of the petition is usually a minor child whose ties to his natural parents have been terminated by death, abandonment, relinquishment or by court decree.[4]

Laws of adoption were introduced during the last half of the 19th century when apprenticeship and indenture, which served the colonial communities well, had become an inadequate provision for dependent children as the new nation became fully engaged in the transition from its simple agrarian beginnings to becoming an urban-industrial society. In this context, the increase in the incidence of child dependency left the old, informal solutions which depended on close family and community ties unfeasible; and new forms of child care, adoption among them, emerged. Initially, adoption was a legal process and the primary concern of the laws of adoption was to specify procedures that would insure the contractual integrity of the transaction. In fact, in some states the adoption process was similar to deed registration.

With the entry of the 20th century, the matter of public responsibility to protect the health and welfare of children ranked high among the concerns of progressive reform, and the evolution of publilc policy for adoption reflects the influence of this era. For the first time the social implications of adoption were thoughtfully addressed, and efforts were started to incorporate what were seen as essential social safeguards into the laws. As adoption evolved as a socio-legal institution, adoption law was influenced by the norms and values of social welfare and social work. In this century, it has become a child-centered institution, and the major strategies for protecting the welfare of children in adoption, as well as the interests of the other parties to the action, bear the imprint of social work ideology. As a result, licensing; social investigation of non-agency adoptive placements; prohibition of third party placements, i.e. placement by persons other than natural parents or duly licensed agencies; public adoption services; and adoption subsidy are the major social safeguards which, over the years, have been incorporated in the over-all public policy for adoption.

Child Welfare —A field of social work practice

The law of adoption and child welfare services have evolved more or less in the same time-frame. As the social work perspective influenced developments in public policy for adoption, adoption services in like manner have had an impact on the whole of child welfare. By the 1870s, congregate care in almshouses and children's institutions as well as mass placement of dependent children with farm families in the "West" were discredited, and new ideas for child-care were developing. Societies for the prevention of cruelty to children were organized to protect children from abusive, exploitive, or negligent treatment from family or other adults responsible for their care. In addition, new child-care agencies were established to provide individualized services to dependent children. A third perspecitive, a minority view to be sure, proposed the development of preventive services to preserve the child's own home whenever possible.

[4]June Brown, "Safeguarding Adoption in California: 1870-1969: A Study of Public Policy Formulation," (doctoral dissertation, School of Social Work, University of Southern California, 1969), p. 2.

The early child-care societies were dedicated to what they called child-rescue or child-saving. When social work achieved professional standing, child-care became child welfare, a specialized field of social work practice. Child welfare practice developed, therefore, with its philosophical beginnings in child-saving, and traditionally, it has relied heavily on the various out-of-home care options as the primary solutions to the problems of family breakdown and child dependency. Traditionally, child welfare workers have been case workers, whose explanatory theories and practice skills have developed in relation to the tasks of evaluation, selection, separation, matching and placement, and child welfare agencies have been organized to provide some form or combination of out-of-home care services.

For more than one-half century, the United States Children's Bureau and the Child Welfare League of America have comprised the national leadership in the field, and their work has focused heavily on upgrading the standard of service in foster care and adoption. Although foster care plus adoption have been synonomous with child welfare, early on, adoption—because of its guarantees of status and permanence for children—became the preferred service. However, as this field of practice evolved, there was minimal interaction between adoption and the other services. Adoption developed under private auspices either as a fee-based service for an economically privileged clientele or as a component of sectarian child-care services. On the other hand, child welfare in the broad sense—income maintenance, foster-care, protective and dependency services, and to a lesser extent services to children in their own homes—developed by public provision after the enactment of the Social Security Act. Given the separate auspices, the uneven quality of professionalism in the public services, the differences in the populations served and the kinds of problems addressed, adoption traditionally has operated as a program apart; a preferred but limited resource among the service options. The distance has never been effectively bridged; not even with the creation of public adoption services.

Adoption Services

Over time, adoption has become acculturated in the nation. It is viewed as an acceptable solution to the problem of child dependency, and, as such, it may be properly described as a social institution, albeit a minor one. Societies design their social institutions to carry out particular social purposes. But the human condition is dynamic, and institutions change or are altered in purpose, form, and operation in relation to changes in the social context that they serve. Accordingly, adoption in the United States was created and has been modified by trends and events that have changed society over the past century.

As adoption services developed, they became a means of providing childless couples with children and mitigating the stigma of illegitimacy for children born outside of marriage. The purpose of adoption services was to individualize adoptive placement, and involved strategies to assure the success of the placement and to enable bonding in the new family. Adoption agencies saw themselves as being responsible for preventing unwise and

unnecessary separation of children from their own families and for protecting adoptive parents from receiving an "undesirable" child.

Reflecting the influence of their era's prevailing social Darwinist notion of "fitness," the early adoption agencies developed the concept of the "blue-ribbon" baby as the suitable child for adoption. As a consequence, adoption services were selective and restrictive, and they met the needs of only a small percentage of the society's dependent children. This model of practice prevailed until the post World War II years when the popular press discovered a flourishing traffice in babies. After the expose came the surveys, and the surveys attributed the "adoption-markets" to a critical shortage of adoption services and to agency practices that had failed to keep pace with changing norms and needs. One response to the public outcry was the states' organization and development of public adoption services. The mandate to the new adoption system was to provide quality services, to increase the availability of services to be commensurate with the demand and need, and to provide equal opportunity for adoption for children whose need for legal status and permanence within a family had never been addressed by the old order. They were Black children and children of other racial-minority groups; children of mixed-parentage; older-children and sibling groups; children growing up with the uncertanties of being in prolonged shelter-care, foster-family care, or in institutions; children with physical or behaviorial disabilities. In the years that followed, these categories came to be known to the profession and to the community at large. These groups comprised a new population of children for whom adoption, when appropriate, should become a true option.

As the years passed, notable changes occured in adoption pollicy and practice. The public system proved to be viable; services expanded and new concepts and principles were applied in the effort to respond to the mandate. The definition of adoptable child changed from the healthy, attractive, white infant to any child who needs and can benefit from having a substitute family. Adoptive applicants, previously evaluated by standards of childlessness and economic advantage, were studied for their capacity to nurture and parent. Strategies such as recruitment, reduction or waiver of fees, trans-racial and single-parent placements, and adoption subsidy were applied in the effort to achieve a more favorable balance between persons willing to adopt and the children waiting.

Still, in spite of the new look in adoption practice, the number of children in foster care tripled between 1961 and 1977 while the adoption caseload has dropped dramatically in recent years. In the past, the significant changes in adoption practice have been reactive responses to public censure. Now, an important data base is emerging from recent child welfare related research which could enable adoption services to assume a proactive stance in evaluating and proposing their function in contemporary American society.[5]

[5]Ibid. A primary source from which the historical material is drawn.

The Modern Social Context

The problem of defining the place and purpose of adoption in today's world perhaps is best approached as part of the larger task of reconceptualizing the role of child-welfare services in contemporary American society. There is an old axiom in the child-welfare policy/planning literature that adoption cannot stand alone but serves best as one program, integrated into a comprehensive, unified plan of family and children's services. Although this principle has been articulated often, the task of developing and testing a basic service model structured to achieve coordination and comprehensiveness in public child-welfare services, operating as the primary social service system but fully integrating private agency resources, has never been seriously addressed. Nevertheless, this notion of organizing a service delivery system that is equipped to respond promptly and appropriately to a range of stresses, problems, and crises that families encounter in daily living is one expression of the concern that exists for the well-being of families and children in our society.

The causes of the stress in American family life are complex, and the solutions will not be found in a simple social services strategy. However, in so far as social services can make a contribution to help famililes perceive their role and function, to be knowledgable of the relationship between family functioning and human growth and development, and to enhance family efforts to meet child-rearing responsibilities, the intervention must relate to a family's needs as they exist.

From the onset of industrialization to the present, much has been written describing the impact of the changing social order on families. In the past decade, there has been an increase in the indicators of family distress and the attendant risks to children. From this, three factors emerge which provide some insight into the causes and characteristics of the vulnerability of the modern American family, and the insights gained comprise a base from which to conceptualize a social service design that is well synchronized with family needs.

First, in our wage based economy, twentieth-century families have become ever more wage dependent for survival and for access to essential resources. In these times of inflation, fluctuating rates of unemployment, and discrimination in employment which creates class-joblessness and wage differentials, many families suffer the deprivations of poverty or the insecurities of economic marginality. In order to cope with the money demands of modern life mothers of young children, wives as well as single-parents, have gone to work in unprecedented numbers.

Second, there has been a change in family structure. In this century, the modal family form has changed from extended, to nuclear, to the more recent pheonomenon—a sustained increase in the number of one-parent families. The climb in the divorce rate, in the rate of illegitimate births, and in the number of single fathers being granted custody of minor children as well as the gradual acceptance of single persons as adoptive parents have contributed to the emergence of single-parent households as an often encoun-

tered family form. There has been both a change in structure and a change in value system; the latter giving increased sanction to the one-parent family as normative, although unique and in need of special support.

Third, family life has been altered. As the family has grown more fragile, weighted by an imbalance of dependent members, it is more alone than ever in its efforts to cope with the complexities of the modern world. Relatives, neighbors and other caring adults who in the past might lend a hand with the actual care of children, who re-inforced the family value systm in their contacts with children, and who provided secondary supervision when children were away from home but still in the neighborhood, are scarce resources in today's world. Families now live with myriad stresses and complications over which they have little or no control, and the signs are legion that many are moving along the continuum from stress, to crisis, to breakdown. The collective conscience is probably most troubled by the growing incidence and/or visibility of violence, sexual abuse, and neglect in families, but a few unheralded signs of the strain on family life are: the substantial numbers of the nation's children growing up in poverty, with minority children, especially Black children absorbing an unconscionable share;[6] the yearly increase in the divorce rate; and a comparable climb in the number of births to unmarried women, of whom almost forty-one percent were under age nineteen in 1975.[7]

Child Welfare in the Modern Social Context

As the patterns of social change and their impact on family life were evaluated, social work researchers, writers and practitioners began to call for substantial changes in social policy to provide supportive resources for families and in the methods and objectives of child-welfare practice. Romanyshyn,[8] and Billingsley and Giovannoni[9] describe the need for an institutional concept of child-welfare which directs the primary remedial efforts to correcting social systems and social arrangements that create problems for famillies. For many years Schorr has advocated the adoption of a national family policy that would guarantee all families with children a degree of economic security.[10] Slightly more than a decade ago, Meyer gave an analytical account of the socio-economic realities that confront American families, and she urged the field of child-welfare to give up its myths and traditions in order to provide the kinds of services that pertain to actual needs of children growing up in the urban environment.[11] The primary purpose of child-welfare should be to help familles to cope with the prob-

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[6]U.S. Bureau of Census, *Statistical Abstracts of the United States*, 1976, Table 673, p. 415. In 1975, 10.9% of all U.S. families were living below the poverty level; 16.8% of all children, 12.5% of white children, 38.9% of minority children, and 41.4% of Black children were growing up in poverty.

[7]Ibid. Table 68, p. 51; Table 87, p. 61.

[8]John M. Romanyshyn, *Social Welfare: Charity to Justice* (New York: Random House, 1971), pp. 319-374.

[9]Andrew Billingsley and Jeanne Giovannoni, *Children of the Storm: Black Children and American Child Welfare* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1972), pp. 241-251.

[10]Alvin Schorr, *Poor Kids: A Report on Children in Poverty* (New York: Basic Books, 1966).

[11]Carol Meyer, "The Impact of Urbanization on Child Welfare," *Child Welfare* 46 (1967): 433-442.

lems of everyday living; the mission should be to help families to do their job, not to find substitute care for children.[12]

Since the 1960s, the need for some form of income guarantee and for family-focused social services has been argued persuasively in many quarters, but to little avail. Although there have been minor reforms, full employment and basic welfare-reform are still very much a part of the unfinished in American social pollicy. Likewise, while there has been some demonstration of the use of family-focused services to interrupt the cycle of family dysfunction,[13] it is by no means the model for child welfare practice. In fact, the reports of two recent studies of the state of affairs in public child-welfare services, which serves the majority of the nation's dependent children, confirm that in the child welfare arena the research and writing of the past decade and current practice are worlds apart.[14]

The concept of services to strengthen family life has been supported by research that found that social services are indeed more effective in keeping children home than in returning them, and that services are more successful with families that are not already long known to the child-welfare system.[15] Nevertheless, the Shyne-Schroeder survey reports that in 1977 the cases of children served by public social services, but living at home, were least likely to have service plans as well as least likely to be assigned to professional staff.[16] Vasaly, in synthesizing the findings of studies of foster-care practices in Arizona, California, Iowa, Massachusetts and Vermont reported that ". . . the studies give little evidence of concerted efforts to work with natural families, to strengthen their ability to cope with life's problems or prevent separation of the family"[17]. Shyne and Schroeder report further that in 1977, neglect and abuse led all problems as the major reasons for service intervention, with neglect occuring twice as often as abuse,[18] and the number of children in foster care tripled between 1961 and 1977.[19]

These data reveal one of two trends that prevail in current child-welfare practice. On the one hand, virtually no services in the professional sense are available to troubled families to strengthen their capacity to manage and to prevent placement. Abuse and neglect account for the highest percentage of service referrals and the number of children in foster care placements continues to rise in spite of strategies and efforts to assure permanence for children who have lost their natural families. On the other hand, adoption agencies, which by and and large have staffed to assure a professional standard of service, are experiencing a declining caseload and looking for new services to provide.

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[12]*A Dream Deferred: Child Welfare in New York City* (New York: Citizen's Committee for Children of New York, 1971), p. 22.

[13]Mary Ann Jones et al., *A Second Chance for Families* (New York: Child Welfare League of America, 1976); Edmund A. Sherman, et al., *Services to Children in Their Own Homes* (New York: Child Welfare League of America, 1973); Alice Overton and Katherine Tinker, *The Casework Notebook* (St. Paul: The Family Centered Project, 1957).

[14]Ann W. Shyne and Anita G. Schroeder, *National Study of Social Services to Children and Their Families* (Washington D.C.: Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Publication (OHD) 78-30150, 1978); Shirley M. Vasaly, *Foster Care in Five States* (Washington, D.C.: DHEW Publication (OHD) 76-30077, 1976).

[15]Jones et al., *A Second Chance*, p. 22.

[16]Shyne and Schroeder, *National Study*, p. 150.

[17]Vasaley, *Foster Care*, p. 30.

[18]Shyne and Schroeder, *National Study*, p. 150.

[19]Ibid, p. 151.

The change in the population of children served by adoption relates in part to the emergence of the slogan, "For every child, a home of his own," and the subsequent push to provide equal opportunity for adoption for children previously considered "unadoptable" as well as to break the cycle of foster care "drift". These notions led to some modifications in traditional adoption policy, program, and practice. As the changes were implemented, adoption agencies gradually began to make a service contribution to children who, in the old order, would have grown up, usually with no plan for permanence, exclusively under the care and supervision of the other child-welfare services.

The declining caseload is influenced by factors that are well known to the society. The new technology in birth and fertility control and the modification of traditional social norms with regard to abortion, unmarried parenthood, and parenthood in general have produced a climate and circumstance in which there no longer exists a predictable group of infants who will be relinquished and available for adoption.

As these trends have converged, adoption has lost its infant population, and there has been a dramatic decline in the number of agency placements.[20] Nevertheless, there is activity within the reduced caseload. While adoptive families are readily found for children under age 3, the ongoing caseload, determined primarily by age and ethnicity, constitutes a new population for adoption agencies; a population that they now share with the other child-welfare services. Shyne and Schroeder report that among the children receiving public child-welfare services in 1977, 102,000, or 6% of the population, were free for adoption. Of these adoptable children, the majority, 57%, lived in foster homes. Their tenure in foster-care may be prolonged because, for one-half of the youngsters who were available for adoption, placement would depend on the provision of financial subsidy. After age 7, even with subsidy, homes are found for less than one-half of the children who need adoptive placement. Also, with subsidy, only 37% of black children and 27% of American Indian-Alaskan children are placed.[21] The complementarity among the services—preventive, rehabilitative, protective, foster-care and adoption—that is required if the varied needs of these children are to be met, clearly makes any plan to continue adoption as a service apart from the other child-welfare services obsolete and indefensible.

Given the range of difficulties that can impinge on family life, perhaps today's children at risk are viewed accurately as a single population. Their need for social services will relate to the level and duration of any problem or dysfunction in their families and the degree to which the difficulty creates deprivation or threatens growth, development, and well-being. Accordingly, the effectiveness of child-welfare services will depend on that system's ability to respond to requests and referrals promptly, flexibly, appropriately, and skillfully at the earliest point possible along the continuum from family stress to family breakdown.

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[20] *Relinquishment Adoptions in California*. (Sacramento: California Health and Welfare Agency Center for Health Statistics, 1975); *Adoptions in 1970* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Publication (SRS) 72-03259, 1972); *Adoptions in 1975* (Washington D.C.: Department of Health, Education and Welfare Publication (SRS) 77-03259, 1977).

[21] Shyne and Schroeder, *National Study*, p. 124-134.

Proposal

A Contemporary Concept of Child Welfare Service

Our review of the present state of affairs in child welfare reveals that the child welfare caseload is a family caseload, comprised of adults who have experienced serious problems in managing family life and children at risk. While there have always been exemplary programs to the contrary, child-welfare agencies by and large are oriented to placement practice and, therefore, are ill-equipped to respond to the social service needs that a family caseload presents.

The kinds of family problems that are bought to child welfare service agencies may be described as the extreme outcomes of the difficulties experienced by many families in a society that accords less status and support to families than in times past. Clearly, employment and income security, a safe and supportive community environment, and access to the society's lines to opportunity are the primary safeguards for family life. As a complement to improvements in basic social arrangements, a system of social services that is designed to respond effectively to the needs experienced by individual families could become a valued social resource. Such a system requires the reconceptualization of the traditional approach in child welfare practice so that services can correspond more closely to the needs of the clientele. Family practice as the mode of intervention has promise as a useful concept for designing, developing, implementing, evaluating, and adapting child welfare practice to the requirements of today's society. The process of reconceptualizing the role and function of child welfare can be engaged by addressing the issues of auspices, administrative design, and standards of practice.

Auspices. The field of child welfare is and should remain a complement of public and private agencies. The scope of the problem of family disequilibrium is extensive and, in principle and practice, the public sector is expected to provide for populations at risk. However, as an outcome of the extensive use of the pruchase-of-service principle, public and private agencies more and more have become collaborators in working with the same population of dependent children. Consequently, the public sector, as the primary service delivery system as well as contracting agent, has the task of integrating its own basic services and specialized, purchased services into a comprehensive, rational service inventory.

Administrative design. The service needs of families who seek or are referred to public child welfare agencies are varied and complex. The agencies, therefore, need resources at hand in order to respond appropriately, promptly, and flexibly to clients' needs as they are evaluated and as they change. This poses the argument for the public system to locate all of its basic child welfare services to children in their own homes, protective services, placement, adoption, and key collateral services such as homemakers under one administrative authority. A plan of single administration would eliminate the problem of negotiating across agency boundaries in order for case planning to have access to the range of service options. The task of coordinating interagency transactions would then apply only to contracting for specialized services and to brokerage of resources outside of the child welfare services system.

Standard of Practice. In the first quarter of 1977, close to two million children—27 per 1000 of the nation's child population—were receiving some kind of public social service. In so far as we believe that this encounter should be constructive, the services provided must be relevant to the problems of a family caseload, with the prevention of family separation and placement as the primary objective, and the methods used should reflect the most effective means of helping that are known. Therefore, the position of this paper is that public social services, the first-line service provider, should be committed to a professional standard of service as the norm rather than the exception. The social service staff should be social work professionals who work from a knowledge base in identifying indicators and patterns of stress, and in formulating treatment goals and plans for which there is a rationale and a plan for accountability. In summary, public child welfare services should be a professional service, and its staff should be prepared to meet the basic social service needs of the dependent children assigned to its care. The staff in that system can then negotiate as professional peers when contracting with the voluntary sector for specialized services to complement the over-all service plan as developed with the families' participation.

The Place and Purpose of Adoption in a Contemporary Concept of Child Welfare Service

Once adoption became a social as well as a legal process, its legality and its guarantee of permanence began to be perceived as the basis for replicating the bonds of biological families. In recent years, however, idealized adoption has been challenged on many fronts. In the late 1960s, reports appeared suggesting that adoptees are over-represented in the use of mental health services. Later, the Black community, particularly its social workers, rejected the practice of trans-racial adoption and called for its discontinuance, with the argument that such placements seriously jeopardize the Black child's ability to develop a sense of self and identity. The most recent controversy involves the attack on confidentiality in adoption, as it is maintained through sealed records, by adoptees in search of their lineage. Finally, in spite of the innovations over the past two decades, the task of locating sufficient numbers of suitable families who are willing to adopt to meet the needs of children who are free for adoption remains an intractable puzzle.

Each of these issues, in its way, suggests that society is looking more thoughtfully at adoption; recognizing that adoptive status has its own unique stresses and questioning it as the preferred option for problems of child dependency. There seems to be an emerging sense that a contemporary concept of child welfare service should be concerned primarily with preventing the need for adoption, and that the ultimate goal should be to reduce the call for it.

Although no longer the preferred service but a complementary service in a child welfare system in which the primary goal is to prevent the separation of families, adoption will endure as a social institution. It will continue to be

an essential service option for those children whose families cannot be helped to rebuild and to function. Accordingly, the history of separateness should be broken; adoption needs to be more closely aligned with the other child welfare services. In localities where adoption is under voluntary auspices, the public child welfare agency and the private adoption agencies will need to explore the ways in which the two systems can adapt and integrate their operations to meet the needs of the contemporary child-welfare caseload. On the other hand, in communities where adoption is under public auspices, but not a part of the broader field of child welfare services, the integration of all the programs under a single administration would allow for planful development of a well coordinated inventory of public social services conceptualized to be relevant and structured to be responsive to the needs of modern families.

The mission of the new system should be to meet the social service needs of children in their own homes, whether living with biological or adoptive families, to provide protective care for children at risk, and to arrange and attend to the intricacies of substitute care, including adoption, when temporary or permanent separation from family is required. Such a mission is complex and requires a professional standard of service which depends on a knowledgable and skilled staff. Professionalism has been uneven in child welfare, but it has prevailed in public and private adoption services, and agency staffs tend to reflect a substantial count of professional social workers. The traditional function of adoption services seems to be in declining demand. However, the knowledge, skill and experience of the staff could represent a potentially rich resource in developing a standard of professional practice in child welfare. Important placement skills should be retained; family practice skills would need to be acquired. Albeit, the professional staff in public adoptions and the other services is the logical base from which to make a professional standard of service normative in a contemporary concept of child welfare services.

Conclusion

Adoption, in the United States, is a creation rather than a tradition of the culture. As such, its purpose and its processes have been modified by the development of new knowledge and by significant soical changes. There will always be a need for adoption to provide a stable context for children who are separated from their biological families to be protected, to grow and mature. The contemporary trend however, suggests that there is wisdom in investing first efforts in helping families to function and to remain together. Insofar as child welfare services can contribute to the achievement of this goal, a coordinated effort of all child welfare resources seems to hold most promise.

ADOPTION AS A DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS: A LIFE EVENT PERSPECTIVE

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"Adoption is experienced progressively
through a series of gradual stages
rather than any single event."

Viola Bernard

Early views of adoption equated it with parenthood by birth and failed to recognize major differences in the two kinds of parenthood. Challenges to this notion began with Jean Paton in 1954 and are being most intensely expressed by Adoptees Liberation Movement Association in their efforts to facilitate the search for birth relatives and to challenge public policy which mandates the sealing of the original birth certificate.[1] Interest in the experiences of adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive parents after adoption has been reflected in research, biographies, and media coverage during the last ten years.[2]

A review of these sources suggests that adoption is experienced developmentally by all three parties. For each of the actors there is a theme which becomes the focal issue in the way the adoption is experienced. For the birth parent, the major issue is the loss of a child and lack of information about the child's subsequent development. For the adoptee, there is the loss of birth parent and siblings and the ensuing challenge of integrating his adoptive status and genetic background. For the adoptive parent the theme may focus on the problem of infertility and the loss of the ability to have a child by birth. This triad of themes related to separation and loss has different meanings at different points in the life cycle. Further, these themes interface, providing certain transactional opportunities and risks to the adoptive triad. This paper explores these themes in relation to the life events of birth parent, adopted parent, and adopted child and then suggests implications for the structure and content of adoption services.

The Birth Parents

In situations where the child is relinquished for adoption or judicially freed from parental control after a parent-child relationship has been established, the birth parents experience bereavement. Birth parents also experi-

[1]Jean M. Paton, *The Adopted Break Silence* (Acton, Calif: Life History Study Center, 1954); Florence Fisher, *The Search for Anna Fisher* (New York: Arthur Fields Books, Inc., 1973).

[2]Arthur Sorosky, Annett Baran and Reuben Pannor, *The Adoption Triangle* (New York: Anchor Press, 1978); John Triseleotis, *In Search of Origins* (London: Routledge, Kegan & Paul, 1973); Ferdinand Colon, "In Search of Self': An Identity Trip," *Family Process* (1973); Betty Lifton, *Twice Born* (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1975).

ence their decision to place a newborn as a loss even though the child is an infant who has not been in their care. Recent research suggests that attachment to a newborn begins during pregnancy when movements can be felt in utero and is demonstrated by the fact that parents begin to attribute certain characteristics to the unborn child.[3] The separation for placement constitutes a loss with all the attendant feelings. In the foster care experience parents experience sadness, worry, emptiness, anger, bitterness, a sense of failure, and relief; it can be assumed that the same range of feeling is evoked when children are relinquished for adoption.[4]

The opportunity for expression of bereavement and movement through the normal mourning processes varies depending upon the extent to which significant others and social workers acknowledge these feelings as non-pathological and provide opportunity and sanction for their expression. It is common for birth parents to experience anniversary reactions in which the feelings of loss are reactivated; with healthful resolution of grief these become times of thoughtful reflection about the child and his meaning to the parent.[5] Some birth parents have concern about whether the adoption plan was a good one or a poor one. The parent wonders what has become of the child, what he looks like and what he is doing at a specific point in time. Where resolution of grief has not gone well the parent may hold fantasies about having placed the child in jeopardy and feel guilty.[6] Fantasies that the child is dead, poorly cared for or abused are exacerbated by the lack of information which parents have about how adoption has met the needs of their child.

At the time when birth parents create a new family by marriage and/or birth of another child, feelings of loss and concern for the placed child may be reactivated. In addition, the birth parent must decide whether to share information about the adopted child with her spouse and children. In making this decision, birth parents may choose to share a personal experience with those close to him/her or to keep the situation a secret which may have long term consequences for the new relationships.[7] One of the problems encountered by adoptees in their search is that the birth parent's significant others are unaware of their existence and the adoptee is perceived as a threat to the existing relationships.[8]

Finally, any events which raise questions about the continuity of the birth parent's life or the life of significant others have potential for evoking feelings of loss or sadness associated with the separation from the birth child. The intensity of these feelings varies from mild concern to a reactivation of deep feelings of loss. Events which are likely to evoke such feelings are the death of significant others (especially children), the onset of acute illness, and the climacteric, with the loss of the capacity to reproduce.

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[3]Arthur Colman and Libby Colman, *Pregnancy: The Psychological Experience* (New York: Seabury, 1971).
[4]Shirley Jenkins and Elaine Norman, *Filial Deprivation and Foster Care* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), pp. 121-136.
[5]Matile Rufrano, "Report on Post Adoption Services at Los Angeles County Department of Adoptions." Lecture given at the University of Southern California School of Social Work, May, 1975.
[6]Ibid.
[7]Ibid.
[8]Fisher, *The Search*, p. 221; Sorosky, Baran and Pannor, *Adoption Triangle*, p. 71.

Of the parties to adoption, most is known about the special needs of adoptees. Development of a healthy identity has been seen as a special challenge for the adoptee because of the presence of two sets of parents: birth parents and adoptive parents. Identity formation requires an understanding of adoptive status and its meaning, and the integration of the genetic or birth history with the experience of being reared by persons other than the birth parents.

Connery's work indicates that a child's understanding of adoption and the meaning attributed to it reflect his cognitive and social development.[9] During the pre-school years, when the word "adoption" is introduced to children it seems to have little effect on their behavior. It is perceived as a descriptive term with little or no connotative meaning.[10] During the latency years, as a child moves into the school arena, concern about the meaning of adoption surfaces as the child comes to understand the implications of adoption, legitimacy, and illegitimacy. During this period the child may want to know why he is not with his birth parents and develop fantasies about the reasons he is not with them. A central issue in this questioning is the extent to which a child holds himself responsible for his parent's unwillingness and/or inability to keep and care for him.

Children are also concerned that their adoptive status will make them different from their peers. This is exacerbated when people in the community view the child's status as unique and/or stigmatized. Characteristically, children of this age bring their questions to their parents who often express discomfort in responding.[11] Upon reaching adolescence, the adoptee expresses concern about the details of his background and the adoption procedure. The new urgency with which the adolescent expresses interest in his status reflects the identity formation tasks of adolescence and the need to integrate the birth and adoptive components of his background. To a large extent this is done alone, or perhaps with siblings who are also adopted; the parents tend to remain external to this process.[12] It appears that is only when the adoptee reaches adolescence that the full significance of adoption is understood.[13]

For the adolescent whose birth parent has been hidden from him because of lack of information or unwillingness on the part of his adopted parents to share existing information, there is a risk that the adoptee will develop fantasies about his birth parents' attitudes and behaviors and consolidate his identity formation by identifying with the fantasized parent.[14] A second risk encountered by the adolescent has been called "genealogical bewilder-

[9]Mary Connery, "The Different Meanings of Adoption," (Los Angeles: County of Los Angeles, Department of Adoptions, 1968), Mimeographed, p. 22.

[10]Ibid., p. 9.

[11]Ibid., p. 12.

[12]Ibid., p. 19.

[13]Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota, "The Adopted Adult Discusses Adoption as a Life Experience," 1968, Mimeograph, p. 21.

[14]Alameda Jolowicz, "The Hidden Parent: Some Effects of Concealment of Parents' Life on the Child's Use of Foster Home Care" in *Source Book of Teaching Materials, Child Welfare* (New York: Council on Social Work Education, 1969), pp. 105-110.

ment." In this state, the adolescent adoptee who is confused about his background may become preoccupied with the questions about his genetic heritage.[15]

The life events of emancipation and marriage may stimulate renewed questions about identity. In fact, early marriage and parenting may be efforts to resolve these issues by the creation of an "own" family and the establishing of an identifiable biological bond. The importance of the birth of the first child is described by Anna Fisher:

> Yes, he did look like me. There was no doubt about it. That nose, those eyes, those ears - they were my connection with someone outside myself. This person was a part of me, as I must be part of someone else, someone somewhere in the world. It was not just the eyes or the nose or the ears. I felt warm and *connected* when I looked at my little baby's face . . .[16]

The birth of the first child is often preceeded by concerns about the adoptee's genetic background and whether the child will be normal or show some unanticipated genetic characteristics.

While the establishing of a family is a major step for the adoptee in creating a sense of continuity, the question "Who am I?" remains and may assume urgency when the adoptive parents become ill and/or die. The search for birth parents often is initiated upon the death of adoptive parents. The desire to locate the birth parents may have been present, but the death heightens the need to be connected and eliminates the possibility of rejecting adoptive parents. Research suggests that the need to search varies with different individuals. Such search activities should not be seen as a sign of pathology but rather as a function of the individual's innate curiosity level.[17] Factors which may also effect the desire to search are being told about adoption in late latency and poor parent-child relationships.[18] Other life events which have the potential for evoking identity concerns are the midlife and the onset of old age.[19] These last two life crises are times when it is normal to review one's life in terms of where one has been and where one is going. For the adoptee the question of identity is a significant part of this review.

The Adoptive Parents

An increasing number of adoptive parents are able to give birth to children, but choose adoption. The vast majority of adoptive parents, however, seek adoption because of an inability to bear children. The inability to conceive is a major narcissistic injury to most individuals and it is necessary for them to come to terms with their infertility by mourning the loss of their reproductive capacity as well as the anticipation of a child by birth. Three

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[15]The concept of geneological bewilderment was developed by H. J. Sank, cited in Sorosky et. al., *The Adoption Triangle*, p. 113.
[16]Fisher, *The Search*, p. 53.
[17]Sorosky et. al., *The Adoption Triangle*, p. 142.
[18]Triseleotis, *In Search*, pp. 155-158.
[19]Sorosky et. al., *The Adoption Triangle*, p. 142.

phases in this process have been identified by Mazor.[20] During the first phase, the couple speculates about why this has happened to them and wonder what they may have done that could justify their barrenness. In the second phase, actual mourning occurs with its characteristic stages of anger, depression and restitution.[21] When the process moves along smoothly, individuals adjust to their infertility. Where this does not occur individuals may feel damaged and this may effect their inter-personal and sexual relationships. During the final phase, the couple must decide how to pursue their desire for children, whether to give it up completely or to adopt children. It is usually in this last stage that adoptive applicants approach social agencies.

For the couple who chooses adoptive parenthood, there are certain tasks. The way in which the tasks are completed will reflect the manner in which they have resolved their infertility. The first task is to accept the difference between parenthood by birth and parenthood by adoption. This requires parents to acknowledge that they are substituting for birth parents and recognize that this form of parenthood may be a second choice for them.[22] The accomplishment of this task requires an acknowledgement that the birth parent will be an influence upon their lives and become a major issue in the mastery of the second task: telling the child about his adoptive status.[23] Those parents who accept the differences between birth and adoption and who are comfortable with themselves and their infertility can take on this task with less likelihood that it will evoke feelings of personal inadequacy. The "telling" requires discussion with the adopted child at the various stages of his development and parents must make a decision about how to share background information on the birth parents.[24] This decision may become the focus of ambivalent feelings about the birth parents. Some adoptive parents indicate they are grateful that the birth parent's circumstances have provided them with an adopted child but at the same time they are jealous of the birth parent's ability to conceive and bear children.[25] These major tasks related to adoptive parenthood often interplay with the theme of infertility.

In day-to-day child rearing activities, there may be additional overlays of this theme. For some parents the child may be a reminder of their barrenness and they may react by being overprotective or rejecting. This becomes one of the risks. As parent-child conflict becomes more difficult to manage, the parents may ask whether this behavior is typical of all children or attributable to the adoption. Parents may wonder whether there is something in the child's heredity which is a causal factor. Implicit in this question is a concern about whether this situation would have occured between themselves and a birth child. In a study of post-adoption services, a major portion of the families seeking services were experiencing parent-child conflict in which a request for information about birth parents was presented as the initial

[20]Miriam D. Mazor, "Barren Couples," *Psychology Today* (May, 1979), p. 103.
[21]Ibid., p. 108.
[22]H. David Kirk, *Shared Fate* (New York: Free Press, 1964), p. 44.
[23]Ibid., p. 147.
[24]Ibid., p. 48.
[25]Rufrano, "Report on Post Adoption Services."

problem.[26] The lack of certainty about the effect of adoption on the parent-child relationship suggests that problems of normal development may be viewed as adoption related.

An additional issue which affects adopted families is the possibility of incest between parents and children and between adopted siblings. In the adopted family the normal incest taboos are not as strong, therefore, the families vulnerability to incestous behavior is greater than in biological families. Parents may have to deal with sexual attraction toward adopted children which may differ from that experienced in a birth family.

Finally, consideration has to be given to the impact which the adoptee's search may have on adoptive parents. For adoptive parents who have not completely resolved the inability to have an own child, the search may be perceived as rejection, and as the seeking of a substitute, rather than an expression of the adoptee's normal curiosity. This may relate to their limited ability to acknowledge and accept birth parents as significant influences in the lives of their family.

Implications for Service

While it is clear that each party to an adoption process experiences it according to one of the major themes identified above, it is important to note that individuals vary in the intensity with which adoption is experienced and in the life events which lead to an increased interest in adoption issues. For some individuals these themes may be rarely expressed, while for others they may be recurrent and a dominant life issue. In considering the provision of supportive services to the adoptive triad, the ways in which the meaning and significance of the adoption unfolds over the history of the family must be considered. Supportive services to the birth families should be available at any time such assistance is needed. Traditionally, services to birth parents and adoptive families have ended at the time the adoption is legalized.

In order to design service in a way that reflects our understanding of adoption as a developmental process, the following suggestions are offered:

1. On-going post-adoption services should begin prior to legalization, with anticipation of some of the long term consequences of terminating parental rights and adoption.
2. Birth parents should be provided with supports and sanctions which will facilitate normal grief over the placed child.
3. Birth parents should be entitled to reports on the legalization of the adoption and non-identifying information on the child's adjustment.
4. Birth parents should be allowed to update the agency records so that recent information on their status is available.
5. Adoptive parents should be provided counseling, support and education which will enable them to cope with adoptive parenthood over the life span of the family.

[26]Ibid.

6. Adoptive families should be offered assistance with child-rearing problems in which the fact of adoption plays a significant role.

7. Adoptive families and/or adult adoptees should be allowed to update the record so that recent information on their adjustment may be available.

8. Adult adoptees and birth parents who wish to search should be offered counseling services which will help them assess the implications and possible consequences of the search for themselves and others.

9. One component of post-adoption services should be to mediate reunions between birth parents and adoptees within the parameters of existing state legislation on confidentiality of birth records.

Adoption establishes complex relationships, some of which are available through experience, others which are not. To enable the triad to successfully master the challenges that adoption brings, institutional support should be available beyond legalization. These service supports will enhance the viability of adoption as a child care resource.

ANGLO AND INDIAN CONCEPTS OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT: SOME CONSIDERATIONS FOR PLACING AMERICAN-INDIAN CHILDREN

By
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The social work principle of universal access recognizes that if this nation is committed to the growth and development of its children, services must be made available to all who need them—whatever race they are, whatever income they have, wherever they live, and whatever language they speak or religion they follow. Child placement is one of these services and American-Indian children are among those most in need of this service.

Since the late eighteen-hundreds, ever increasing numbers of Indian children have been uprooted from their families and placed in foster care situations. Surveys have indicated that approximately 25 to 35 percent of all Indian youngsters are separated from their families and are living in substitute homes. Many of them have been sent far away from their territories to attend boarding schools. Others have been placed in differing kinds of institutions and in foster or adoptive homes. The majority have been sent to live with white caretakers. Such placements have commonly been carried out on the insistence of governmental agencies, whose policies have been formulated with little input from the Indians. The intent seems to have been to acculturate the dependent Indian child to the white man's way of life and to deny him his Indian identity. Throughout this period of time, Indian leaders have resisted such cultural encroachment. During the nineteen seventies, there have been some legislative steps taken to allow the rights of Indian people to greater self-determination in the rearing their children.

Traditionally, Indian families lived in small collective communities. Their children belonged not only to a specific family, but also to their band or village members who shared in giving them care and protection. The family and community were oftimes synonymous. The communities were composed of families interrelated through blood and official ties. Children found security with these others. If their own parents could no longer care for them, they were accepted into these related families and there was no need for other types of placement.

Today, the pattern of families banding together in cohesive living groups has largely broken down. There has been a waning of community pride and the organization of many Indian communities is diffuse. There is less family cooperation and the strength of the community has diminished. Dependency on the American government has increased, due to the decrease in self-determination that the government agents have either encouraged or allowed. Many of the public services provided have not been tailored to meet the special needs of the Indian people.

Stresses caused by the acculturation process have led to considerable social disorganization in the institution of the Indian family. The introduction of new values and mores, the loss of traditional roles in the kinship system, the decline in the importance of the role of the male, and the poverty caused by loss of a sound economic base have all contributed to this. The

consequences have been an increase in intra-family strife, excessive use of alcohol, delinquency, mental and physical illness, and child neglect and abuse. The rate of illegitimacy is exceedingly high and many young adults are refusing to marry. These consequences are causing homelesness for more than a hundred thousand Indian children.

While the extended family continues to be a vital unit in Indian society, the nuclear family unit is becoming increasingly common. The family support systems are no longer meeting the needs that they once did. The disorganization of once-established Indian communities and the resulting diminished kinship ties have led to an ever increasing need to find new homes for Indian youngsters. There is concern among the Indian people that their children have been placed in Caucasian families and are being raised in non-Indian ways. Some see this trend toward interracial placements as leading to genocide of the Indian tribes. In response to this concern, some efforts are now being made to recruit and use Indian families to provide their own foster care and adoptive homes. Services are also being provided to strengthen the Indian families so that their children can remain with them.

The Indian people have their own value system for determining what they consider to be a "good family." The criteria among "Full Bloods" is based largely on the behavior of family members. Qualities considered to be desirable include: honesty and reliability, being generous and sharing with others, keeping out of constant trouble, being loyal to their kin and helpful to those in need, and drinking only moderate amounts of alcohol. The economic status of the family is considered to be of little importance.

The "Mixed Bloods" are more likely to adhere to the middle-class standards of white families. Their determination of what is a good family includes factors such as having steady employment, owning a comfortable dwelling and a late model car, dressing well, and formal education. Such families have, to a considerable extent, broken away from their Indian heritage. They have become acculturated to being more aggressive and competitive. It is also probable that they have become converts to the Christian religion.

It has been a common practice for social workers to place children with foster and adoptive families who hold and practice the same religious beliefs as do the children's blood parents. An exception has been made in the placement of Indian children whose parents follow their traditional religions, and the placement has been used to gain the children as Christian converts. The traditional Indian religions both teach and practice a pantheistic view of life. This view holds them to a basic truth that man is a part of a delicately balanced universe in which all components—all life forms and natural elements—interrelate and interact. No part is more or less important than another, and only man is capable of upsetting this balance. In contrast, most white man's religions subscribe to the belief that nature is to be mastered to benefit man and that man is superior to all other forms of life.

These opposing philosophies have been responsible for the basic differences between Caucasians and Indians in their child rearing practices. Indian parents pay high respect to the individuality of their children, allowing them great freedom to grow and develop in their own natural ways. Parents instruct their children about "right and wrong," but allow them the

final decision about what to do. White parents tend to believe that it is the adult's responsibility to direct and control his children until the parent's values are internalized by the child and he is prepared for his superior role in the scheme of things. Any child caught between these two sets of values will be confused and find it difficult to internalize either code of behavior.

The adoption of a child usually means a change in his name. This has a different significance for the Indian child. In American white society, the patronymic pattern of naming has been followed. Indians have traditionally used only given names. These are choosen to identify a personal characteristic that might be recognized in a child (Happy Boy or Long Face) or after a special event in the child's life (Red Cloud). Quite commonly, naming is delayed until such time as the child has developed an identifiable personality and can be appropriately named. Some Indian youngsters are not given a name until they reach school age and their teacher is called upon to name them. With the incursion of the white man's customs and the bureaucracy that he has created, most Indians now possess a family name. This has sometimes been gven to them by a government agency. They may or may not choose to use this and some will change names several times during their lilfe span. The Indians' use of names can be confusing to those officials who are responsible for keeping legal records and can complicate the proceeding in making arrangements for adoptions.

Indian youngsters are taught to socialize in different ways than are the children of white families. Infants and young children are treated with love and devotion, and passed from person to person to be fondled and admired. Parents show no aversion to their children's bodies and there is no condemnation of infantile habits while the child is developing a system of communication between self and body and self with kin. The infant ego is respected until such time as children are fully weaned, and they are allowed freedom to explore and play with the mother's body, as well as their own.

As Indian children grow older, they are shown less open affection and are discouraged from displaying open affection. Eventually this restraint of feeling becomes a personality trait and it is this that has earned the Indians a reputation for being a stoic people. White parents who have adopted Indian children have commented on the limited emotional response that they get from their youngsters. Social workers who persist in probing for an expression of feelings from their Indian clients can expect to meet considerable frustration from the lack of overt emotional response. This practice of restraint in communications should be recognized for what it is—culturally determined behavior and not personal resistance.

In most tribal groups it is common practice to expose children to humor, almost from the beginning of their lives. Parents and other adults tend to kid and tease. Children quickly emulate this practice and use humor with one another. They learn to laugh at external situations and at themselves. Older youngsters are given recognition for their developing abilities to spin fanciful yarns and for their ability to do this with a serious tone and a straight face. Teasing is quite commonly used as a disciplinary measure. Youngsters are teased instead of scolded or spanked for wrong doing. This practice serves to shame the child into good behavior and is a highly effective method of discipline with Indian children who are taught the importance of self-pride.

The practice of shaming may be misunderstood as being a form of psychological abuse, unless it is placed within the total context of Indian child rearing methods.

Non-interference in the activities of children is common in Indian families and villages. Parents or other adults will not interrupt or interfere while a child is engaged in some activity of his own; instead they will wait until he has completed what he is doing. This shows respect for the child's autonomy and does not interrupt his concentrated interest or the creative thinking that might be in process. By the same token, children are taught not to interrupt their elders. This arrangement allows children and adults to be comfortable together, each free to engage in what is important to that person at a given time. Respect for this practice is important when working with Indian clients.

"Full-Blooded" parents regard spiritual training to be the major task of any form of education; intellectual accomplishment is regarded as being less important. Children are believed to possess magical and spiritual qualities that lead to an inner awakening that comes before full maturity. Indians assume that there is an inborn and sincere search for enlightment in every youngster. Because they are at one with nature, they must be left alone to follow their own individual development. The white man's schools are perceived to interfere with the natural unfolding of children; therefore Indian parents place little value on formal education. This, in turn, results in the majority of their children becoming disinterested in school by the time they reach puberty.

Most social agencies and social workers responsible for the placement of Indian children have not themselves been Indian. Whenever one cultural group or individual assumes a responsibility for another, there is the risk that planning and decision making will be inappropriate to the needs of the persons served. In today's world, placement workers are faced with the paramount issue of where and with whom is it best to place American Indian children. If these youngsters continue to be placed in white homes, then placement practices will continue to contribute to the nullification of the Indian culture. If the children are to be placed in Indian homes to be raised in Indian ways, then the white man's efforts to acculturate his Indian brothers will be defeated.

Many Indians who have been raised by their own people find themselves to be misfits when they leave the reservation and go to live in larger society. The Indian child who has been reared in an Anglo-Saxon environment tends to get lost from his own people and lives with a confused identity and an incomplete acceptance by either white or Indian society. Such a bewildered identity may account in part for the high incidence of suicide among Indian youth.

The placement of Indian children has been alleged to be a white man's burden. Relatively few Indians have been engaged in this service to their own people. Only a limited number of Indians have achieved the education that prepares them to practice social work. If this profession is to serve their educational needs, then it must more actively recruit Indian students, provide them with the economic and moral support that they will need to attend school, and provide a program that gives special recognition to their own

cultural values and practices. Traditional methods of practice are not entirely appropriate when applied to the Indian's life style—one that should be both respected and preserved.

Recognizing the plight of the Indian people and their longing to preserve their own heritage provides reason to question current placement policies and practices and to make recommendations for change. A paramount recommendation is that of discouraging the continuance of placing Indian children in Anglo-Saxon homes. This practice has violated the rights of the Indian people to raise their own children. The availability of potential foster care and adoptive homes among these people has never been fully exploited. Recruitment methods have not been designed to attract and provide enough surrogate Indian parents. To carry out this recommendation, new approaches to the recruitment of homes will be necessary.

It is recommended that the standards for licensing Indian foster families or approving them for adoption be determined by the Indian people themselves, even though these standards may differ somewhat from those established by white society.

Because limited incomes have prevented many Indian families from adopting a child, the provision of adoption subsidies could well solve this problem and make it financially possible for families to consider adopting. It is therefore recommended that special consideration be given to providing subsidy payments to Indian families who otherwise qualify to adopt and have the desire to do so.

A disproportionate number of adoptable Indian youngsters still reside in institutions and in temporary foster homes. It is recommended that a concerted effort be made to seek adoptive homes within the Indian families where they can feel a sense of permanency with their own people.

Today, American Indian families are living on many different levels of acculturation. For many, there is a persistant fear of cultural strangulation. The continuation of trans-racial placements may further contribute to this. Instead, placement practices must be designed to accommodate the blood-deep intention of these people to remain Indian.

More important than the recommended changes and improvements in the placement practices with Indian children, should be the elimination of the social and economic crimes committed against Indians that produce the social and family disorganization that causes the need for the placement of such a disproportionate number of their children. The further development of resources and services to strengthen and support the Indian family could diminish the need for placement. Social workers have a responsibility to serve as advocates for the Indian people, working to help them gain their rights to land ownership, fair employment, educational opportunities, and good health care as well as greater understanding, recognition, and acceptance by larger society.

Cultural disintegration and the inability to care for children economically or spiritually have brought with them apathy in personal relations. In the past, governmental agencies persisted in placing Indian children away from their own people and this, in turn, led many Indians to become so apathetic that their resistance was dissipated. Until recently, they seemed to have been willing to turn over parenting responsibilities to others. Although this

indifference still exists among some, today there is a growing demand among the Indian people that they be allowed to determine for themselves the fate of their children.

"Wakan Tanka, be merciful to us always.
I am sending a voice. To the heavens of the universe,
I hold my pipe and offer it to you
That my people may live!"

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ADOPTION SERVICES IN THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY

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Meeting the ever-increasing service needs of minority groups has been a continuing challenge to social workers in the field of adoptions. If the profession is to enhance its credibility among the Mexican-American population, it is necessary that adoption institutions modify their service system to make it more responsive to the needs of the Mexican-American community.

The rapid increase in the Hispanic population in the United States makes it imperative that the needs of the Mexican-American community be examined and assessed, to provide for maximum efficiency of delivery systems for adoption services. The number of children of minority background, including Mexican Americans, who need permanent homes, is large.[1] Adoption agencies, both public and private, have engaged in efforts to recruit adoptive parents of similar ethnicity for these children. In spite of these recruitment efforts, the trend appears to be toward the placement of children across racial and ethnic lines.[2] Although this trend has received only slight attention in either the social work profession or in the field of adoptions, it is a matter of growing concern to Chicano social workers and to members of the Mexican-American community who feel that transcultural adoptions should be attempted only after all available resources and outreach efforts have been explored.[3] The absence of specific literature in the field makes it difficult to assess the extent to which transcultural adoption represents a problem within the Mexican-American community, but there is a general agreement among Chicano social work professionals that the situation demands a long term commitment to the placement of Mexican-American children in Mexican-American homes.[4]

Present recruitment efforts appear to attract only middle-class Mexican Americans, rather than reaching all groups in the barrios,[5] and, despite the recent attention focused on the major concerns of the Mexican-American,[6] there is still a widespread lack, even among professionals, of a working knowledge and understanding of the needs and diversity of this particular population. If recruitment is to be effective, it is essential that adoption agencies be aware of the obstacles which have discouraged or prevented many Mexican Americans from availing themselves of adoption services.

[1]Dolores Rodriguez, Social Work Supervisor, Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services, Bureau of Adoptions, 1979: personal communication.

[2]Lela B. Costin, Child Welfare: *Policies and Practice* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), pp. 385-388.

[3]Manuel Ahuero, President of Trabajadores de la Raza (Chicano Social Workers Organization), 1979: personal communication.

[4]Rodriguez, personal communication.

[5]Ibid.

[6]"La Causa Chicana," *Social Casework* 52 (May, 1971): 323-324.

A Profile of the Mexican-American Community

According to the 1976 Bureau of Census estimates, approximately 11.2 million persons in the United States are of Hispanic origin, and the majority of these (6.7 million) are of Mexican descent.[7] Mexican Americans are the second largest minority group in the United States, and the largest in the Southwest. The Mexican-American population is concentrated in subregions and cities, such as Southern California and Los Angeles. The Mexican-American population in the state of California is estimated at 3,179,000, with 1,890,000 of that number residing in Los Angeles County.[8]

Eighty per cent of Mexican Americans live in urban areas, and the majority are employed as blue collar workers. The median age of Mexican Americans is 20.7, comapred to 28.6 years for the overall population. In 1974, the median income of white families was $13,356; Mexican-American families had a median income of only $9,498.[9] Mexican Americans have completed fewer years of school than most other ethnic groups in the United States. Language and literacy problems abound, and Spanish is the language used in the barrio. Thus, economic and social factors combine to make the Mexican-American especially vulnerable to racial and cultural prejudice and discrimination.[10]

Community Service Systems

Mexican Americans have been immigrating to barrios in the United States urban areas in great and small waves. A commonly defined community with specific geographic boundaries, whose resident population is predominantly Mexican-American, the barrio is a microcosm of the dominant society. While interrelating with its external institutional structures, such as law enforcement, the school system and the public welfare system, barrios also have indigenous service systems which provide mutual aid and psychological support in time of need. Indigenous support systems include churches, neighbors and friends, the family, and alternatives services.

Many Mexican Americans, especially the elderly and immigrant groups, have relatively strong religious ties and attend church on a regular basis. The church, whether Catholic or Protestant, acts as an important spiritual support for many Mexican Americans, and in addition, acts as a vehicle for the dissemination of information about barrio activities and services, reaching individuals who would be largely inaccessible to public agencies. The parish priest or minister often knows of potential adoptive parents, especially in the case of childless couples.

Concerned neighbors and friends also provide mutual aid and act as a resource. Perceived as confidential sources of advice, these significant persons act as referral agents. Lee's study on the use of services of a model

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[7]U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Persons of Spanish Origin in the United States*, Current Population Reports, No. 290, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976).

[8]*Los Angeles Times*, January 19, 1977.

[9]Bureau of the Census, *Persons of Spanish Origin in the United States*.

[10]Rodriguez, personal communication.

neighborhood health center by Mexican Americans observed that some groups tended to use primary groups such as friends and neighbors as their major source of information about health care services.[11]

The family clearly plays an important role in providing economic, social, and psychological supports. Families also act as potential adoptive parents for family members who are no longer able to care for their children. Especially in the case of older children, the grandparents may offer to care for and eventually adopt them. Other relatives, or the child's Godparents or Compadres, may also accept the responsibility of raising the child or children. Infants, of course, may also be adopted in the same manner. It is essential, however to keep in mind that no matter how effective this network may be, it is the adoption agency, rather than the network itself, which has access at all times to the greatest number of adoptable children and the greatest number of prospective adoptive parents, in the greatest geographical area, and it is the agency that has legal responsibility for bringing children and adoptive parents together.

As a result of the Chicano movement, alternative service systems are being developed within the barrio to deal with the special needs of the Mexican-American community. Although there are variations in the services offered in each barrio, common patterns are observable in both structure and function. Self-help groups, social action organizations, and specialized service agencies which have exclusively bicultural and bilingual personnel are considered the most essential aspects of the alternative service system.

Literature

A computer search of the library holdings of two major universities found no published studies or articles on the use of adoption services by Mexican Americans.[12] Most of the literature which focuses on recruitment of potential adoptive parents from minority groups deals with the experiences of Native Americans and Blacks.[13] Although specific studies on the Mexican-American experience do not presently exist, the Black experience with adoption agencies provides a useful foundation for discussion of adoption services to minority groups in general since many of the obstacles to adoption which are faced by Blacks resemble what is known about Mexican Americans in relationship to other services.

Dukette and Thompson reported on the Chicago adoption project, which emphasized flexible requirements, in an attempt to reach out to potential Black parents.[14] The findings of the project indicated that certain conditions prevented a large number of Black couples from applying for adoption. The factors identified were: (1) limited income and inadequate housing; (2) a

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[11]Isaiah C. P. Lee, *The Pattern of Medical Care Use of Mexican Patients with a Model Neighborhood Health Center in Los Angeles*, (Ann Arbor: University Microfilm, 1972).

[12]Computer searches were done at the University of Southern California and the University of California at Los Angeles, 1978.

[13]Costin, *Child Welfare*, pp. 382-385.

[14]Rita Dukette and Thelma G. Thompson, *Adoptive Resources for Negro Children* (New York: Child Welfare League of America, 1959).

general lack of knowledge and understanding about adoption services; (3) doubts and suspicions held by potential adoptive parents about the Black child who was uncared for by his/her own family, relatives, or friends, and therefore available for adoption; and (4) the fear of rejection.

Fanshel studied the outcome of adoptions applications in one large family agency.[15] He observed that in comparison with white applicants, Black applicants had lower incomes, less education, and a higher rejection rate due to factors related to low-income status. The findings of Woods and Lancaster were similar to those of Fanshel.[16] Billingsley stated that there were indications of a high correlation between the percentage of independent adopters and percentages of non-caucasian adoptions, and concludes that the relaxation of agency restrictions and policies regarding acceptance of applicants had not been far-reaching enough to increase the number of Black adoptive parents.[17]

On the other hand, the major reason why Black couples do not seek adoption in greater numbers appears to be that of low socio-economic status, since studies have shown that Black couples who were financially able to adopt, did so at as high or higher rate than white couples.[18]

Obstacles to Use of Adoption Services by Mexican Americans

In the case of the Mexican-American, the principal obstacles to the use of existing adoption services appear to be: geographic isolation, language barriers, lack of familiarity with and/or knowledge of institution and procedures, and low socioeconomic status.

Adoption agencies are frequently inaccessible to the Mexican-American client because of their distance from the barrio. For example, East Los Angeles has a large concentration of Mexican Americans, yet the closest adoption facility is eleven miles away in the central part of the city. Until this year, the only Spanish-speaking adoption unit which served Spanish-speaking clients exclusively was located 30 miles away, in Covina. However, the unit is now housed within the main office in central Los Angeles, making it more accessible to the Spanish-speaking population.

Many Mexican Americans, especially first generation Mexican Americans, speak Spanish as their first language, and speak little or no English. The absence of bilingual, bicultural personnel directly affects the use of services of adoption for those who do not speak or understand English. In Los Angeles County, where the highest concentration of Spanish-speaking people live, there are only three bilingual, bicultural social workers in the adoption program to serve Spanish-speaking clients. One Spanish-speaking client traveled more than 40 miles from the San Fernando Valley to

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[15]David Fanshel, *A Study in Negro Adoption* (New York: Child Welfare League of America, 1957).

[16]Sister Francis Jerome Woods and Alice C. Lancaster, "Cultural Factors in Negro Adoptive Parenthood," *Social Work*, 7 (October, 1962): 14-21.

[17]Andrew Billingsley and Jeanne Giovannoni, "Research Perspectives on Interracial Adoptions," in *Race, Research, and Reason: Social Work Perspectives*, ed. Roger R. Miller, (New York: National Association of Social Workers, 1970), pp. 57-77.

[18]Elizabeth Herzog and Rose Bernstein, "Why So Few Negro Adoptions?", *Children*, 12 (January-February 1965): 14-18.

Covina, because she had heard from a barrio neighbor that the staff spoke Spanish and would understand her adoption needs.[19]

Many Mexican Americans are not aware of the normal requirements or procedures for adoption. The adoption agency is usually perceived as being essentially middle class, and accepting only middle class applicants. It is assumed that the agency wants only well educated, English-speaking applicants, with above average incomes. Thus, many working-class couples do not apply to adoption agencies. Many have inflated ideas about the fees charged for adoption, or are unaware that fees are based upon a sliding scale.

Large numbers of Mexican-American families, who might otherwise adopt, lack reliable income, stable employment, and/or adequate housing. Because of low socio-economic status, many are not eligible to be adoptive parents.

Discussion

Implicit in the above discussion is the need for research in the following areas: (1) information about attitudes towards adoption in the Mexican-American community, (2) identifying those recruitment methods which have, and those which have not, proved effective with this group, and (3) determining what factors encourage Mexican Americans to adopt, and what factors discourage them from adopting through public agencies.

The problems of linguistic differences and geographical inaccessability, however, scarcely require any further documentation. Bilingual and bicultural personnel are absolutely essential in any agency which serves a community with a large Mexican-American population, assisting the Mexican-American client at every stage of the adoption procedure, from initial recruitment to finalization. Outreach efforts can be attempted by taking advantage of the communication services network already functioning in the community.

The direct involvement of adoption agencies and workers with the Mexican-American community must be the first step in a long term commitment to place Mexican-American children in Mexican-American homes. Community leaders must be recruited as resource people to provide information about the need for adoptive parents in the Mexican-American community and to interpret the requirements and procedures for adoption. In this way social workers can establish linkages to the informal support systems and to the alternative service systems of the barrios. Persons in these indigenous systems can, in turn, inform community residents of the services of the adoption agencies and the need for parents.

Once the role of the adoption agency is vitalized through community involvement, the decentralization of services becomes a truly viable alternative to the present system. Opening sub-offices or operating in multi-purpose centers staffed by workers already actively involved in the community and its problems, will give adoption services higher visability and greater opportunities to serve the community at large.

[19]Rodriguez, personal communication.

Conclusion

The role of the adoption worker must be modified to deal with the ever-increasing and complex community issues which impinge upon the lives of the Mexican-American people. Sensitivity and responsiveness to the needs of this population must be incorporated into every phase of agency operation—through the use of inservice training in the culture, needs, and community structure of the barrio; through the utilization of bilingual, bicultural personnel; through the use of existing facilities and communication networks in the community; and through a sincere commitment to the goal of self-determination of all people.

HELPING ADOPTIVE SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

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There are two types of adoptive single-parent-families. The first is headed by a parent who was married at the time the children were adopted, and subsequently became divorced or widowed. The second is a family headed by a parent who was not married at the time the children were adopted. This article will focus on the second type.

Single adoptive applicants, unlike widows and most unwed or divorced persons, make conscious, deliberate choices to join the ranks of the over 8.7 million single-parent families in the U.S.[1] Each child adopted by these persons adds to the ranks of the over 13 million children growing up in single-parent-homes. Athough many adoption agencies place children with single persons, some social workers have trepidations about such placements. This fear is reflected in governmental and agency policies about adoptive single-parent homes. In general, the policies permit such placements only if suitable two-parent homes cannot be found for children-in-need-of-families.[2], [3] These policies, which are based upon erroneous preconceptions, create unnecessary negative stresses on single persons and on the families they establish through adoption. This paper discusses some of these stresses and suggests how social workers may better help adoptive single-parent families.

Like all adoptive applicants, the single person must undergo the considerable discomfort which results from having to ask society—as represented by the adoption agency—for a child. Those single persons who are capable of giving birth to a child, but choose to adopt rather than give birth out-of-wedlock, probably experience less stress than those who are infertile and have no other choice. Nevertheless, as members of a society which esteems self-reliance, having to ask for a child can be profoundly upsetting. Such feelings are compounded by the fact that applicants must qualify for parenthood. Unlike natural parents, adoptive applicants—whether married or single—must measure up to someone else's judgment about their suitability to be parents. The criteria by which the applicants are judged many not be explicit, or may be ones with which the applicants disagree. To participate in this qualification process, applicants must submit to inspections of their private emotional, psychological, social and financial lives.[4], [5] Cady likened this process to an "inquisition," the impact of which resembles that which is experienced by "penitentiary prisoners at the parole hearings that would decide their futures." [6]

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[1]U.S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 97th Ed., Washington, D.C., 1976.

[2]Vilma Jordan and William Little, "Early Comments on Single-Parent Adoptive Homes," in *Child Welfare Services: A Sourcebook*, ed., Alfred Kadushin (New York: MacMillan Co., 1970).

[3]Linda Burgess, *The Art of Adoption* (Washington, D.C.: Acropolis Books, 1976), p. 125.

[4]Child Welfare League of America, *Child Welfare League of America Standards for Adoption Service*, (New York: Child Welfare League of America, 1968), pp. 44-47.

[5]Trudy Bradley, *An Exploration of Caseworkers' Perceptions of Adoptive Applicants*, (New York: Child Welfare League of America, 1966), pp. 4-13.

[6]E. Cady, *We Adopted Three*, (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1952), quoted in *Shared Fate*, by David Kirk, (New York: The Free Press, 1964).

The stresses generated by the qualification process are magnified for the single applicant by the insults inherent in the policies regarding adoptive single-parent families. Burgess succinctly states the policies as follows:

> Because a family with both a mother and a father is preferable to a single-parent home, unmarried persons who want to adopt usually have to consider children for whom there are no adopting couples, the hard-to-place children.[7]

An analysis of such a policy reveals that single-parent families are regarded as "second-choice" or even "the last resort" for children. Influenced by the cultural ideal of the two-parent family, policy makers and those who implement policy assume that as a result of having only one parent in the home, a single-parent family is, inevitably, less functional. Since most families with minor children have two parents, and single-parent families are a minority—albeit a fast growing minority—the latter is, by definition, a deviation from the norm. In the minds of many, this deviation rapidly translates to "deviancy" in a derogatory sense. Social workers who hold this view point to the "fatherless," "broken," "incomplete" single-parent families they have on their caseloads as empirical justification for their point of view. Until recently, social workers, administrators and others could also turn to the social science literature for "scientific" endorsement of these negative valuations of single-parent homes. However, recognizing that all single-parent families were not equally bad, and perhaps there were some which were "good"—albeit not as good as two-parent homes—policies were established in some agencies to accept single applicants, under special conditions.

When this writer was a single adoptive applicant, she attended an orientation meeting at a large adoption agency in an East Coast city. The meeting was conducted by a young social worker who evidenced surprising callousness to the feelings of the fifteen single applicants who were present. In an off-handed way, she told us about our second-choice status, and reinforced her apparant disdain by rattling off all of the hurdles we would have to overcome in order to qualify. After the meeting was over, several of the prospective applicants gathered at the elevator a,d shared their rage at the psychological indignities to which they had been subjected. Concerned that this social worker expressed the sentiments and callousness of the agency, the author applied to a smaller private agency where she was treated with respect, and adopted her first child.

Unfortunately, negative attitudes towards single-parent adoptions are not confined to one agency, nor to one part of the country. When applying for a second child at an agency in a large West Coast city, the author encountered the same indignities. During the interview with an otherwise skillful worker, the author was told, "Tell me about the kind of boy you want to adopt. If we find him, we will first check the computer to see if any couple wants such a boy. If so, he will be offered to them first. If no couple wants him," she added, "then we will offer him to you."

This type of blatant discrimination places the single applicant in a position not unlike that of Blacks and other persecuted minorities. If such a person

[7] Burgess, *Art of Adoption*, p. 125.

feels relatively good about himself, he will be angered and insulted by the implications of a policy which relegates him, merely because of his marital status, to a second-class category. Yet directing his anger at the agency and/or the worker is likely to jeopardize his chances of obtaining a child. Like other minorities who are discriminated against, single applicants react to this in a variety of ways. Depending upon the person's coping style, he may endure the indignities with silence, displace it, or internalize it and experience it as anxiety or depression. The single applicant with relatively low self-esteem may accept the policy implications, thus exacerbating his already problematic self-regard.

If this attitude towards single-parent homes prevades an agency, it will, inevitably, effect the adoptive child, especially an older child. The challenge of preparing an older child who knows about and accepts the cultural norm of two-parent families is real. But the task is made more arduous if the worker holds negative preconceptions about single-parent adoptions. No matter what reasurring words the worker may utter as she prepares a child for adoption by a single person,if she has negative or strongly ambivalent feelings about single-parent homes, she will consciously or unconsciously convey it. Such feelings may reinforce the child's negative feelings about himself and about his prospective family.

This is particularly relevant because the policies stipulate that only "hard-to-place" children be available to single applicants. Children with such labels are, in effect, designated as "second-class" children. The irony of the policy is that social workers rightly discern that "hard-to-place" children, that is, children who are "older," physically and/or emotionally handicapped, racially mixed or members of ethnic minorities, have "special needs." [8] Their "special needs" make it more difficult than usual to parent these children. Yet it is these children who are, generally, deemed the only ones to place in single-parent homes.[9], [10] This, logically, means that the easier-to-parent children are placed with (rewarded to?) the "better equipped" two-parent homes; while the difficult-to-parent children are placed with single parents who, as a class, are assumed to be less well-equipped to rear children!

Yet these assumptions about single-parent families have not been borne out by research.[11], [12], [13] What the research has shown is that such families are diverse. They exist in all social classes, among all racial and ethnic groups, and in ages ranging from under fifteen to over fifty. The heterogeneity which exists among the women and men who head single-parent families means that they differ in their capacities, motivations, and opportunities to function as viable family units. So do two-parent families

[8]Jordan and Little, "Early Comments," pp. 338-39.

[9]Burgess, *Art of Adoption*, p. 125.

[10]Child Welfare League of America, *Standards for Adoptions*, p. 50.

[11]Alfred Kadushin, "Single-Parent Adoptions: An Overview and Some Relevant Research," *Social Service Review* 44 (1970): 263-274.

[12]Andrew Billingsley and Jean Giovannoni, "Family, One Parent," *Encyclopedia of Social Work*, 17th Issue, (New York: NASW 1077), pp. 397-408.

[13]Elizabeth Herzog and Cecelia Sudia, "Fatherless Homes: A Review of Research," *Children* 15 (September-October, 1968): 167-182.

differ. There is no consistent empirical evidence that single-parent families are inherently less viable than two-parent families.[14, 15, 16, 17]

Studies which have focused on adoptive single-parent families report that these families function well.[18, 19, 20] In spite of the trepidation with which the Los Angeles County Department of Adoptions began, in 1965, to place children in single-parent homes, their subsequent study found, "In every placement thus far, our workers have been tremendously impressed by the positive development of the children and the growing feeling of 'good parenting' that the adoptive mothers experience."

Clearly, not all single applicants can or should be allowed to adopt children. Social workers do have a responsibility to find the best homes they can for the children in their care. Nevertheless, social work agencies need to recognize that children can thrive in a variety of family forms. A major variant family form is the single-parent family. Members of such families are living an alternative life-style.[21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26]

Although the number of single-parent families is rapidly growing, such families still account for a minority of American families. Adoptive single-parent families constitute a minority within this minority. Thus, the single adoptive applicant makes a conscious choice to assume an atypical role. This atypicality is a major contributor to the distinctive aspects of the adoption experience for single applicants. Not every social worker in adoptions can or should work with these atypical applicants. The cultural ideal of the two-parent family may be too entrenched into a workers's value system to allow him or her to impartially evaluate single applicants. The adoptive applicant who chooses to remain single, thereby deliberately separating the parental role from the marital role, or an applicant who has had an otherwise unconventional life-style may pose serious threats to a worker's core values. As this author pointed out in an earlier publication, special care must be taken by the worker that his biases do not effect the judgements which he is required to make about clients involved in alternative life-styles.

The children who are placed in single adoptive homes will get their clues about how to feel about this arrangement from the adults in their lives. The single parent who does not feel guilty about being one, and does not try to "make up" for it by trying to be "both father and mother," will facilitate a child's acceptance of his variant family life-style.

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[14]Ruth Brandwein, Carol Brown and Elizabeth Fox, "Women and Children Last: The Social Situation of Divorced Mothers and Their Families," *Journal of Marriage and The Family* 36 (1974): 498-515.

[15]Herzog and Sudia, "Fatherless Homes," pp. 167-182.

[16]Kadushin, "Single-Parent Adoptions," pp. 263-274.

[17]Billingsley and Giovannoni, "Family," pp. 397-404.

[18]Jordan and Little, "Early Comments," pp. 338-340.

[19]Joan Shireman and Penny Johnson, "Single Persons as Adoptive Parents," *Social Service Review* 50 (1976): 103-116.

[20]Joyce Baldwin, Susan Shrem and Clara Williams, "An Examination of the Experiences of Single Adoptive Parents," (MSW Research Project, University of Southern California, School of Social Work, 1977).

[21]Helen Mendes, "Single Fathers," *Family Coordinator* 24 (1976): 439-448.

[22]Dennis Orthner, Terry Brown and Dennis Ferguson, "Single-Parent Fatherhood: An Emerging Life-Style," *Family Coordinator* 25 (1976): 429-438.

[23]Linnda Caporael, "Psychology and the Single Mother," *Momma: The Sourcebook for Single Mothers*, ed. Karol Hope and Nancy Young, (New York, New American Library, 1976), pp. 43-54.

[24]Harry F. Keshet and Kristine Rosenthal, "Single Parent Fathers," *Children Today* 7 (May-June, 1978): 13-17.

[25]Shireman and Johnson, Single Persons, pp. 103-116.

[26]Jordan and Little, "Early Comments," pp. 338-340.

Indeed, there are some advantages to a single-parent home. Some children who have been severely deprived and rejected feel isolated and of little worth as human beings. Such children need the kind and amount of involvement and nurturance a single person can give because he or she does not also have to give to a spouse. The kinds of damaging experiences some children have suffered require "intensive care" which may best be given by an adult unencumbered with the demands of a marital relationship.

Another advantage of a one-parent home is that there is only one authority within the family.[27] This avoids the kinds of struggles which some couples have when they each bring different perspectives to how children should be reared or how the home should be managed. Still another advantage is that many children in single-parent homes (as well as in other homes where mothers are employed) tend to be more independent than children in families where the mothers are at home all day.[28]

Social workers, administrators and policy makers will be able to help more children and more adoptive single-parent families if they begin to involve themselves in meaningful dialogues about the uniqueness of single-parent adoption. For some people this will require that they read the current body of social science literature about such families. For others, this will mean exposure to alternative views about such families. For all, it will mean a reappraisal of basic attitudes, and a development of greater self-awareness. Hopefully, this will ultimately result in the elimination of policies which relegate a group of people to second-class status, solely because of their marital status. Perhaps one day the standards by the Child Welfare League of America, and other public and private policy makers for adoption services will, instead of proposing that "All *couples*" will assert that "All *adults* should have an equal opportunity to apply for the adoption of children, and to receive fair and equal treatment and consideration of their qualifications as adoptive parents, under applicable law and the criteria developed thereunder." [29]

[27]Victor George and Paul Wilding, *Motherless Families* (London and Boston: Routledge and K. Paul, 1972).
[28]Jane Hedges and Jeanne Barnet, "Working Women and The Division of Household Tasks," *Monthly Labor Review* 95 (April, 1972): 9-14.
[29]Child Welfare League of America, *Standards for Adoptions*, p. 44.

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THE IMPACT OF LEGAL DECISIONS AND TRENDS UPON THE TRADITIONAL ROLE OF ADOPTION WORKER

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Gregory Bateson, the well-known Anthropologist said: "The Western World begins by making splits then drawing boundaries, then solidifying those boundaries. We, then, fool ourselves into believing what we have made ourselves see. Solidifying boundaries is comfortable because it allows us to deny our experience." [1] It blinds us also to the interrelatedness of problems and their solutions. At a time in our society when there is rapid change,[2] Dr. Bateson's observations encourage us to reexamine the professional social work roles within this changing social, economic, legal and political context. Despite the fact that knowledge is an essential element in social work practice, the boundaries imposed by professionalism persistently discourage an interest in acquiring knowledge in those fields contiguous to the profession which not only influences but actually changes the professional roles. For example, landmark legal decisions and subsequent social trends have had a profound affect upon Juvenile Court and child welfare services, necessitating that social workers in these settings have a better understanding of the legal system and the impact of these decisions, if they are to be effective.

Beginning with the Gault[3] decision in 1967, governmental services to benefit infants and incompetents have been challenged because of the alleged abuse of administrative discretion which violates the rights of the persons served. Prior to Gault, the decisions of the juvenile court were not appealable because it was thought that all decisions were based upon the welfare of the child. Evidence, however, has proven to the contrary. Justice Fortas said that "the results of the juvenile court have not been entirely satisfactory. Juvenile court history has again demonstrated that unbridled discretion, however benevolently motivated, is frequently a poor substitute for principle and procedure. Departures from established principles of due process have frequently resulted not in enlightened procedures but arbitrariness." [4]

The Gault decision, and subsequent decisions, which give certain rights to children and limits administrative discretion, have changed child welfare and juvenile court services. This article reviews the impact of these and other legal trends upon adoption services.

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[1]Daniel Coleman, "Breaking Out of the Double Bind: An Interview With Gregory Bateson," *Psychology Today* 12 (August, 1978): 43-51.
[2]Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Random House, 1970), pp. 20-34.
[3]In re Gault, 387 U.S. 1 (1967).
[4]Ibid., p. 19.

BACKGROUND OF ADOPTION LAW

The statutory law of adoptions has been operative for one hundred years in many states. Its intent is to provide stable homes for those children who have no homes or whose homes are beyond repair so that they can grow into healthy individuals. The state's authority for this intervention is its *parens patriae* power—its guardianship over persons of disability, such as minors, the insane and incompetent persons.

The adoption situation has changed radically in the past seven or eight years. Adoptions have decreased substantially. Unfortunately, supply and demand do not match: the adopting public still seeks newborn or young infants even though they are no longer available in large numbers because of the increased use of contraceptions and abortion and the growing tendency of unmarried mothers to keep their babies, at lease initially.[5] Many of the children who need adoptive homes are considerably older and a fairly large number come from minority backgrounds.[6] Many of them continue to live in "temporary" foster homes for years and years, sometimes until they reach their majority.[7] The longer these children remain in foster homes, the harder it is to find families willing to adopt them; eventually they become unadoptable.[8]

These changes on the adoption scene have resulted in efforts to re-orient adoption agencies and the adopting public toward the adoption of older, medically handicapped children and children of all ethnic and racial backgrounds.[9] Traditional selection criteria to match the characteristics of children and their adoptive parents are failing,[10] and in some states, public subsidies are provided for the adoption of the hard-to-place children.[11] There is, however, an interest among minority groups in adopting children of their own racial and ethnic heritage; social agencies, understanding that many children often do better in families of their own racial background, are developing new approaches that respect the cultures of these groups.[12]

Although the shift to the adoption of older, medically handicapped and minority children has met some success,[13] many adoptive couples continue to prefer white infants. Competition for the white infant has led to an increase in black market operations and "gray markets" which involve payments of high fees to intermediaries with access to adoptable infants.[14] The adoption agencies are hard hit by this highly competitive adoption

[5] *California. Health and Welfare Agency. State Social Welfare Board. Unplanned Parenthood* (1974).

[6] Joseph Morgenstern. "The New Face of Adoption." *Newsweek* (Sept. 13, 1971): 66.

[7] George and Larry, Michelle and David v. Beame, U.S. District Court Southern District of New York, 75 Civil 36, Jan 1976, p. 20.

[8] I. Geiser. "The Shuffled Child and Foster Care." *Trial* (May-June, 1974): 29.

[9] Program Review Branch, California Dept. of Finance. *A Review of the California Adoption Program* 95 (1974): 133. This report estimates that 2,700 to 8,100 of the 34,000 children in foster care in California could, with some effort, be placed in adoption.

[10] "Adoption for the Hard-to-Place: The Role of the Court and the Trend Against Matching." *University of Miami Law Review* 25 (1971): 749-753.

[11] Office of Child Development, U.S. Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare. *Model State Subsidized Adoption Act and Regulation* (1975).

[12] Delores P. Aldridge. "Problems and Approaches to Black Adoptions." *Family Coordinator* 23 (1974): 407. Leon T. Chestang. "The Dilemma of Biracial Adoption." *Social Work* 17 (1972): 100.

[13] Morgenstern. "The New Face of Adoption." pp. 71-72.

[14] "Baby Sales for Big Profits." *Christian Science Monitor* (June 24, 1974).

situation.[15] This is a potentially dangerous situation for children who run the risk of being treated as "commodities," and of being placed in potentially unhealthy family environments.

COMPETING INTERESTS IN THE ADOPTION PROCESS

In the past, adoption served the interest of the adopter in perpetuating his family name and fortune,[16] but today it has the principal objective of providing a secure family environment for children who cannot live with their original parents, the "de facto" parents and any intermediaries. The interests of all are to be secondary to the interests of the child, but sometimes there are conflicts among these interests; courts may concentrate on the resolution of a peripheral controversy in a manner not necessarily conducive to the child's well being.

Adoption must serve the interest of the adopter as well as the child's; however, if adoption is sought primarily to satisfy the adopter's need and not the child's, the two interests may conflict.[17]

The natural parent may participate in the adoption process initially as one who is willing to relinquish the burden of the parenting, but later the parent may refuse to give formal consent to the adoption, or vacillate in the decision. Such indecision by the parent and the insistence on parental rights may exist in situations where it is unrealistic for the parent not to follow through.[18]

Additional complications arise when the interest of the unmarried father is not consistent with the mother's, especially since the decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in Stanley vs. Illinois.[19] The mother may place the child for adoption while the father may wish to care for the child himself.

There may be "de facto parents" such as relatives, friends, or others serving as foster parents with whom the child has lived who oppose the adoption by a stranger, either because they wish to adopt the child or because they want to continue caring for the child as foster parents.[20]

Others involved in the adoption process may be intermediaries—doctors, lawyers and licensed adoption agencies. The aims of some of these may not be consistent with the welfare of the child. All of these competing and divergent interests could be adverse to the child's interest; therefore, adoption must have legal safeguards to protect the child from undesirable results such as the child being placed in an uncaring home; being torn from a secure home; or kept waiting, uncertain where he will live.[21]

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[15]Children Home Society of California, *Annual Report* (1973), indicates a shift to other activities, such as counseling and the provision of child care.

[16]Stephen B. Presser, "The Historical Background of the American Law of Adoption," *Journal of Family Law* 11 (1971): 443-516.

[17]Joseph Goldstein, Anna Freud & Albert J. Solnit, *Beyond the Best Interests of the Child* (New York: Free Press, 1973), pp. 22-23.

[18]"Natural v. Adoption Parents: Divided Children and the Wisdom of Solomon," *Iowa Law Review* 57 (1971): 171.

[19]405 U.S. 695 (1972).

[20]Sanford Katz, "Legal Aspects of Foster Care," *Family Law Quarterly* 5 (1971): 78.

[21]Goldstein, Freud, Solnit, *Beyond the Best Interests of the Child*.

There is a shift in the balance between the parental rights and the interest of the child; a growing acceptance of foster parent adoptions; and the relaxing of boundaries among adoptions, guardianship and other custody arrangements.

Parental Rights and the Interests of the Child

In the past, the courts have awarded the custody of children to their biological parents because it was felt that children were young and malleable, therefore could adapt to change more readily than adults, even after long periods of separation and when the child had never lived with the parents.[22] Psychiatrists and psychologists have warned that a young child is emotionally more delicate than an adult and more apt to be damaged, sometimes permanently, when uprooted from a secure environment.[23] Regardless of this consequence to the child, many courts proclaim the superiority of parental rights to custody.

There is some evidence that another point of view is making its way into the legislatures and the courts, as attention is shifting to a recognition of the needs of the child.[24] There are signs that in a clash between the parental rights to custody and the interest of the child, the child's interest is beginning to assume a position of legal authority.[25]

Court decisions reflect this ascendancy of the child's rights. In a New Jersey adoption, the child's placement was continued with prospective parents to whom he had become attached, over the assertion of parental rights by the natural parents.[26] A Florida court held in a stepparent adoption case that the best interests of the child take precedence over the parental rights of the father who had not seen the child in years.[27] A New York court declared that abandonment is not a matter of intent but a matter of parental conduct and an adoption will not be delayed to give parents more time to rehabilitate themselves.[28]

Consistent with the recent trend is Pennsylvania's new adoption law which alters the grounds for dispensing with parental consent for adoption. Under the new law, consent to adoption is not required if the parent "has refused or failed to perform parental duties for six months."[29] The clear purpose for changes in consent to adoption laws is to avoid the long term "temporary" status of children where the biological parents have not shown an interest and a concern. The trend is toward a more objective yardstick—

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[22] "Alternatives to 'Parental Rights' in Child Custody Disputes Involving Third Parties," *Yale Law Review* 73 (1963): pp. 151-55.

[23] Goldstein, Freud, Solnit, *Beyond the Best Interest of the Child*, p. 40.

[24] Henry H. Foster and Doris Jonas Freed, "A Bill of Rights for Children," *Family Law Quarterly* 6 (1962): p. 343.

[25] Christine Davies, "Custody and Adoption: Some Interrelated Problems," *University of Toronto Law Journal* 23 (1973): 88.

[26] In re Adoption by P., 114 N.J. Super. 584, 277 A. 2d 566 (Appl. Div. 1971).

[27] In re Adoption of Vincent, 219 So. 2d 452 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1969).

[28] In re F, 76 Misc. 2d 617, 351 N.Y.S. 2d 337 (1974).

[29] Pa. Stat. Annotated, Title I, Sections 311, 414 (Supp. 1975-76).

the length of time of child-parent separation—rather than parental fault or subjective intent to abandon. This developing change from subjective to objective, no-fault criteria for child abandonment again portends a shift toward greater strength of the interest of the child versus the rights of the absent parents.[30]

It is suggested that one of the guidelines for determining what is in the best interest of the child be the least detrimental, the least potentially harmful alternative.[31] This approach gives more guidance to the decision maker and more weight to the needs of the child rather than weight to the fitness of the parents or their intentions.

Toward the Acceptance of Foster Parent Adoptitns

In the past, a child placed by an agency for purposes of foster care had almost no chance of being adopted by the foster family. The placement contract usually provides that all decisions about the child's future are the responsibility of the agency, and that the child is to be returned to the agency upon demand. Placement contracts of this type have often been enforced by the courts, even when the child has lived with foster parents for many years and a strong and affectionate relationship has developed between the foster parent and the child. Foster care programs and adoption programs have been administered as two separate systems making it administratively difficult to cross the line from one program to the other.[31]

Foster parents have organized themselves in the past five years and have made demands upon agencies to have a greater voice in the decision about the foster children. The Organization of Foster Parents for Equality and Reform brought an action against the Administrator of New York City's Human Reuources Administration in 1974 challenging the constitutionality of procedures governing the removal of foster children from foster homes. The matter was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court,[33] because the Organization lost in the state courts. Although their contentions, that their rights to certain procedures were equal to the biological parents, were not sustained, the Court did agree to the following:

> Thus the importance of the familial relationship, to the individuals involved and to the society, stems from the emotional attachments that derive from the intimacy of daily associations, and from the role it plays in "promoting a way of life" through the instruction of children, as well as from the fact of blood relationship. No one would seriously dispute that a deeply loving and interdependent relationship between an adult and a child in his or her care may exist in the absence of blood relationship. At least where a child has been placed in foster care as an infant, has never known his natural

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[30] "Recent Trends in California Law Concerning the Best Interest of the Child," *Pepperdine Law Review* 1 (1973): 89.

[31] Goldstein, Freud, Solnit: *Beyond the Best Interests of the Child*, pp. 53-64; In re B.G., 114 Cal. Rptr. 444, 523 P2d 244, 11 Cal. 3d 679 (1974).

[32] Charles P. Devereaux, Ray Fagerstrom and Sylvia Kerr, *Adoptions and Foster Care Study Report* (Sacramento: California Department of Health, 1973).

[33] Smith v. Organization of Foster Families, 53 L Ed 14 (1977).

parents, and has remained continuously for several years in the care of the same foster parents, it is natural that the foster family should hold the same place in the emotional life of the foster child and fulfill the same socializing functions, as a natural family.[34]

The Court recognizes that foster parents can become psychological parents and states that their function is equivalent to the functions of biological parents.

Toward Alternatives to Adoption to Preserve Family Ties

The approach to custody has been treated differently by the several courts which hear these matters: family law, probate, juvenile and adoption courts. In California, all matters of custody are to use the same standard for determining the custody issue, although there are several courts with jurisdiction to hear these matters. It is in In re B.G.[35] that the standard was articulated by the California Supreme Court. Once there is a unification of all custody proceedings, including adoptions, in one court department, guardianship (which is usually under probate court) becomes readily available as an alternative to adoption and may be preferable to a plain custody decree in many cases.[36] This arrangement would also permit the continuing ties with persons with whom the child has a psychological or biological relationship, even though he may not be in the custody of those persons.

NEW CONSTITUTIONAL MANDATES

Constitutional developments affecting the law of adoptions include the rights of illegitimate children, recognition of the legal interest of the unwed father, emphasis on the right to notice of pending adoptions, and the imposition of stricter due process requirements in the termination of agency placements.

Marital and Nonmarital Children

The present adoption laws distinguish between marital and nonmarital children in one respect: the adoption of marital children requires the consent of both parents, whereas a nonmarital child may be adopted without the consent of the father. A series of recent United States Supreme Court decisions have declared illegitimacy a suspect classification under the Equal Protection Clause.[37] It is evident, except in the area of state regulation of interstate succession, that the Supreme Court today condemns any legal disadvantages to which children are subject for the sole reason of their birth. Justice Powell, in

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[34]Ibid., p. 35.

[35]In re B.G., 114 Cal. Rptr. 444 (1974).

[36]Michael Taylor, "Guardianship or Permanent Placement of Children," *California Law Review* 54 (1966): 714.

[37]Jimenez v. Weinberger, 417 U.S. 626 (1974) (rights of nonmarital children to social security disability benefits); New Jersey Welfare Rights v. Cahil, 411 U.S. 619 (1973) (equal rights to welfare benefits); Gomez v. Perez, 409 U.S. 537 (1973) (rights of nonmarital children to support from father); Weber v. Aetna Cas. & Sur. Co., 406 U.S. 164 (1972) (illegitimate children entitled to workmen's compensation benefits from the death of the father); Levy v. La., 391 U.S. 68 (1968) (recovery for wrongful death of mother of nonmarital child). Also the passage of the Uniform Parentage Act in some states: California enacted in 1975—Civil Code Section 7000.

Weber v. Aetna Cas. & Sur. Co., stated:

> Imposing disabilities on the illegitimate child is contrary to the basic concept of our system that legal burdens should bear some relationship to individual responsibility or wrong-doing . . . Obviously no child is responsible for his birth and penalizing the illegitimate child is an ineffectual—as well as unjust—way of deterring the parent.[38]

A complete abolition of the distinctions between marital and nonmarital children cannot be achieved totally, but the recent constitutional decisions have assisted in removing some of the opprobrium which has been attached to being an "illegitimate" child. In the past, some women have sought adoption for the child because of the societal attitudes toward the out-of-wedlock pregnancy.

Rights of the Unwed Father

Until recent court decisions, the father of an out-of-wedlock child has been the forgotten man who has had the duty of support but no parental rights of any kind.[39] This has been remedied by the Stanley v. Illinois decision (U.S. Supreme Court, 1972). Although this was a neglect and dependency case, the ruling has been extended to all unwed fathers' situations. The Supreme Court declared that the "interest of a man in the children he sired and raised, undeniably warrants deference and, absent a powerful countervailing interest, protection." [40] The U.S. Supreme Court made it clear Stanley applies to adoption cases when the case of Rothstein v. Lutheran Social Service was remanded to the lower court for a reconsideration of that case in light of the Stanley case.

It is clear that the unmarried father has some rights when the mother gives the nonmarital child up for adoption. The issue is what are these rights? Is consent for adoption required by all unwed fathers? Do all unwed fathers have to be notified about the hearing? Many states have enacted notice requirements but this has had an unsettling affect upon adoptions. If the father is unknown or hardly known to the child, any move to achieve absolute equality between married and unmarried fathers by extending consent requirement to unwed fathers is of dubious benefit to the child, and may in fact be in direct conflict with the child's interest. Children have become the victims of delayed adoptions, uncertain adoptions, and further court delays as the law gets clarified because of the requirement to notify the father.

In a very recent decision, Caban v. Mohammed,[42] the United States Supreme Court found unconstitutional a New York statute which made a distinction between the unmarried mother and the unmarried fathr. The mother and the stepfather adopted the children without the consent of the unwed father. Justice Powell, in this decision, stated:

> Gender-based distinctions must serve governmental objectives and must be substantially related to achievement of those objectives in order to withstand judicial scrutiny under the Equal Protection

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[38] 406 U.S. 164,170 (1972).
[39] "Father of the Illegitimate Chid—His Rights to be Heard," *Minnesota Law Review* 50 (1966): 1071.
[40] 405 U.S. 645 (1972).
[41] 405 U.S. 1051 (1972).
[42] 39 CCH S. CT. Bull., B2138, April 25, 1979 (Advance U.S. Supreme Court Reports).

> Clause . . . Appellees assert that the distinction is justified by fundamental difference between maternal and paternal relations that a "natural mother, absent special circumstances, bears a closer relationship with her child" (than a father does) . . . Contrary to appellees' argument and to the apparent presumption underlying Section III, maternal and paternal roles are not invariably different in importance.[43]

This case seeks to end the discrimination against the unwed father in those instances where he has been, or tried to be, an active parent. The Court recognizes that "a father who has a substantial relationship with the child and has admitted his paternity should not be treated differently. The effect of the New York's classification is to discriminate against unwed fathers even when their identity is known and they have manifested a significant paternal interest in the child. The facts of this case illustrate the harshness of classifying unwed fathers as being invariably less qualified than mothers to exercise a concerned judgment as to the fate of their children." [44]

The effect of this case upon adoption law will be that those unwed fathers who have shown concern for the child will have a significant voice in the decisions made about the child; their rights have been elevated to those of the mothers.

Due Process Concerns

Due process is flexible standard that is grounded in judicial concepts of fundamental fairness. How much process is due the individual depends upon the circumstances. The United States Supreme Court has stated "the fundamental requisite of due process of law is the opportunity to be heard." [45] It can limit arbitrariness in decision making. The cases—Stanley and Caban—are due process as well as equal protection cases.

An agency may terminate the placement of a child in an adoptive home at any time before the entry of the decree of adoption. The child may be removed for valid reasons, such as physical abuse or neglect, alcohol or drug abuse, or for reasons which are much less clear and compelling. The criteria for either placement or revocation are vague and broad. Justification for termination can be easily made since adoptive families naturally suffer from the same imperfections and instabililties as other "normal" families in society. At issue is whether due process would require a limited hearing, particularly if the child has developed a psychological bond with the adoptive parents.

Right to Know One's Origin

In the great majority of the jurisdictions, sealed records statutes prevent the adopted person from learning the identity of his biological parents. It is not surprising that in recent years there has been an increasing desire among

[43]Ibid., p. B2142.
[44]Ibid., p. B2147.
[45]Goldberg v. Kelly, 397 U.S. 254 (1970).

adoptees to learn of their natural heritage. As a result, the Adoptee's Liberty Movement Association (ALMA) was founded in order to provide mutual assistance in the search for natural parents. First, Ninth, and Fourteenth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution are used to make the argument that the adoptee has a right to know. His/her psychological well being often hinges upon this information.[46]

But, the rights of the adoptee must be balanced against the rights of the natural parents and the adoptive parents.

ADOPTION WORKERS MUST REEXAMINE THEIR ROLES IN LIGHT OF RECENT LEGAL DECISIONS AND TRENDS

These are trying times for adoption workers who find their peace and tranquility shaken by court decisions and other social trends. They must know more about the workings of the legal system. Cases must be prepared with a knowledge of the rules of evidence and the law. If a worker seeks a termination of parental rights, the facts of the case must fall within the interpretation of the legal facts presented in the statute. It is to be remembered that the worker presents the facts to the court; the court makes the legal conclusion. Too often, social workers in legal settings are subjective, judgmental and present their own conclusions to the court. To know and to understand the legal system will lessen the frustration and increase the possibility of the desired outcome.

Lawyers and child welfare workers, including adoption workers, find themselves working for the common goal, but unsure about the philosophy of the other as they approach this goal. Social workers see the law as technical, rigid, logical and precise; not interested in the solution of the interpersonal problems.[47] They must accept that the adversary process is the legal profession's version of the scientific method. To make judges and lawyers more sensitive, adoption workers can coordinate, with the Bar Association and other interested groups such as foster parents, a yearly colloquim to focus upon certain child welfare issues.[48]

CONCLUSIONS

The explosion of rights in the past ten years has affected all social services by checking arbitrary decision making which has resulted in unfairness to the clients and/or others. Additionally, child welfare policy is being questioned because many children remain permanently in temporary foster placements which are adverse to their social and emotional development. Califano, the former Secretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, has stated: "The present federally supported foster care program is a classic example of a perverse incentive systm that is viciously antifamily. This is theatre of the absurd govarnment policy."[49] Vice President Mondale confirmed this new

[46] "The Adoptee's Right to Know His Natural Heritage," *New York Law Forum* 19 (1973): 137-147.

[47] Charles L. Schottland, "Social Work and the Law—Some Curriculum Approaches," *Buffalo Law Review* 17 (Spring, 1968): 724.

[48] The Los Angeles County Superior Court—Conciliation Court has found this effective.

[49] *The Courier-Journal*, 13 July 1977, Section A, p. 1.

direction in child welfare in the following statement:

> We believe that a special effort should be made at both the federal and state level to ensure the right of every child to a loving, stable family . . . Emphasis will be placed on preventive services, so that children are not removed from the home needlessly, and on reunification servics to bring families back together whenever possible.[50]

[50]*The Louisville Times*. 12 July 1977, Section A, p. 1.

INTERPROFESSIONAL WORK IN ADOPTIONS PRACTICE: COLLABORATION AND BEYOND

By
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Adoptions practice requires collaboration among the social welfare, legal and judicial systems, and the nature and climate of work at points of intersection can greatly affect both the outcome of the process and the attitudes of parties involved in the adoption. The positive or negative effects of the adoptions process can affect the adjustment and future of new adoptive families, refused prosepctive adoptive parents, and children who are not placed. In addition, the climate of such collaborative work can greatly affect the future interprofessional efforts of all involved. Thus, positive working relationships and successful completion of the process in one case can auger well for successful collaborative work in the future. Similarly, difficult or negative experiences can have deleterious effects on the adoptions interaction system and on future clients.

The adoptions process for clients is a complex and emotionally charged series of events which involve adoptions workers, lawyers and judges in a variety of responsibilities. Social workers are involved with insuring the eligibility of children for adoption and in termination of bio-parental rights. They are involved directly in "matching" and placement decisions to provide permanency for children. Lawyers are involved in the termination or relinquishment of parental rights, and in insuring the eligibility of children for adoption. Lawyers also represent adoptions agencies and other parties in the adoptions process. Judicial approval is required to permit initial placement under agency supervision and to confirm the adoption as final.

Lack of communication, disagreement, or dissension between the social worker (or agency) and the judicial system (the judge and related court staff and lawyers) can undermine or negate the expected outcome of adoptive placement. Disagreement can occur on the basis of fact, interpretations of fact, or value preferences. In all cases, the social worker is most often in the position of advocating for the prospective adoptive family, in seeking to validate to the court that this child and these parents or this parent should and can constitute a supportive and successful family unit. Thus, interprofessional collaboration is a critical component of the adoptions process. This paper will focus on interprofessional issues faced by social workers and will discuss strategies for improving collaborative and advocacy skills as a means of improving services to children waiting for adoption and prospective adoptive parents.

Collaboration is most simply defined as working together toward a common goal. Collaborators carry different roles and frequently posses different skills and knowledge bases, yet they bear shared responsibility for accomplishment of the specified goal.[1] Interprofessional collaboration in-

[1]Naomi Brill, *Team-Work: Working Together in the Human Services* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, Co., 1976).

volves the working together of two or more persons from different professions. On a continuum of interaction, collaboration may range from parallel communication to insure that agreed on actions are carried out in an autonomous way, to intensely integrated joint practice where some aspects of roles may be shared and mutual responsibilities carried.[2] Collaboration may involve joint planning and may entail difficult negotiation.[3]

Collaboration between professions is compounded when professional value bases and ethical responsibilities to clients differ. Each profession is uniquely shaped by the influences of history, practice models, knowledge bases, and skills complexes; such differences often present taxing problems in carrying out collaborative efforts and responsibilities.[4]

Given these differences, it would be naive to assume that collaboration will occur naturally in interprofessional situations. Professions carry different socially sanctioned missions supported by particular knowledge, values, ethics and skills. Even with good will and a general sharing of a common goal, there are often difficulties in achieving productive collaborative ends.[5] Lack of clarity regarding roles or clear division of responsibilities can cause battles over "turf" and a variety of other difficulties. The operation of a profession within a host setting frequently causes problems related to role clarity and professional autonomy; these issues tend to be exacerbated within a complex bureaucratic structure.

Law, one of the traditionally recognized professions, rests on the societal need for methods of dispute resolution when informal problem solving methods have been unsuccessful. Historically, the legal profession has emphasized the autonomy of the individual practitioner in performance of services and accountability to clients. While lawyers increasingly practice in bureaucratic settings, this traditional model still carries great force. Judges most frequently are appointed or elected to preside over and decide disputed issues between parties. Frequently, judges are drawn from the ranks of the legal profession and while the court-related functions of judges and lawyers differ, a "common-language" and a common perspective on methods of dispute resolution are most frequently shared. In contrast to the autonomous, individual practice model of law, social work derives from an institutional base and is one of the earliest professions to develop methods of agency responsibility and agency-based as well as practitioner-based methods of accountability for service.

Social work, legal practice, and judicial processes are all concerned with problem solving. Yet the focus and means of problem resolution is quite different. Social work operates primarily from a mediating, resource mobilization and therapeutic base. Legal practice and the judiciary on the other hand derive from constitutional, statute law and the tradition of English common law. The Anglo-American legal system is founded in the adversarial process of legal representation of conflicting interests with a neutral party, the judge, required to determine problem resolution. While proceed-

[2]Marie Weil. *Practicum in Law and Social Work: An Educational Program in Interprofessional Education* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1977) and Brill, *Team-Work*.
[3]Weil, *Practicum*, p. 3.
[4]Ibid., p. 3.
[5]Ibid., p. 4.

ings regarding parental rights and adoptions proceedings may or may not be adversarial, the aura of the adversary process frequently pervades the court and it is incumbent on the legal and judicial professions to assure that the rights of all parties in a case are represented and that one lawyer does not attempt to represent competing or potentially competing interests.

Social work, on the other hand, has traditionally been involved in resolving problems through engagement with and among troubled persons. Frequently social workers are asked to work simultaneously with persons whose interests might be viewed as competing or potentially conflicting. Social workers in general have not been trained in adversarial processes and the use of conflict strategies has been minimized.[6] Strategies of problem-solving through support, cooperation, collaboration, mediation or negotiation are far more commonly practiced by social workers.

Given these differences in history and perspectives, a variety of problematic situations can result from collaborative practice. Lack of clarity regarding role functions and basic responsibilities may greatly hinder professional practice and goal attainment. Sociological research has indicated that expectations of the performance of others greatly affect attitudes toward actual performance.[7] If the expectations of the collaborative parties about each other coincide with the individuals' expectations for themselves, the possibilities of effective collaborative work are increased. Where there is mutuality regarding basic role perceptions and agreed upon designation of tasks, the effectiveness and efficiency of collaborative work is increased.[8]

The fundamental components of effective collaborative practice include: clarity about roles and role boundaries, agreement about assignment of responsibilities and tasks, an understanding of the mission, knowledge and value bases of each profession involved in collaboration, and competency and confidence in one's own field. Professionals require a solid grounding in their own discipline and an understanding of, and optimally a respect for, the disciplines with which they collaborate. Such understanding of one's own and related professional roles provides a grounding for collaborative practice.

Roles in Adoptions Practice

The judicial role in adoptions is fairly straightforward. It is a decision making role involving the hearing of evidence, deliberation and consequent decision-making about eligibility for adoption or placement. Initially, a judicial decision is required to confirm relinquishment or termination of bio-parental rights and rule that a child is eligible for adoption. Further along in the adoptions process, a judge hears the petition for adoption and recommendations from social workers and lawyers regarding the adoption, and after deliberation decides to permit or refuse placement of a child with

[6]George Brager and Harry Specht, *Community Organizing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973).
[7]David Silverman, *The Theory of Organizations* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1971); Alvin Gouldner, "Reciprocity and Autonomy in Functional Theory," in *Systems, Change and Conflict*, ed. N. J. Demerath and Richard J. Peterson (New York: The Free Press, 1967).
[8]Weil, *Practicum*, p. 8.

adoptive parents. Generally, following a period of agency supervision, a judge confirms or denies the adoption. Judges carry the power and social sanction to create new families through judicial procedures.

The role of lawyers in agency sponsored adoptions has two foci:[9] the lawyer is responsible for (1) handling legal procedures to accomplish the adoption and (2) representing the rights and explaining the responsibilities of those involved in the adoption.[10] An adoption cannot be carried through to completion without these legal services.[11] Major issues of individual rights are involved in adoptions, such as issues of custody, guardianship, legitimacy, and rights to inheritance. While the role of the lawyer in agency sponsored adoptions is determined in part by the nature of the agency though which the lawyer works, general legal responsibilities can entail involvement in issues of legal status, and issues of liability and contracts as well as adoptions procedures and pleadings.[12]

The National Conference of Lawyers and Social Workers has defined the following areas of responsibility for lawyers retained by adoptions agencies:

1. Advisement of natural parents regarding consequences of relinquishment of parental rights;
2. Advisement of biological parents of their right to seek independent legal counsel and referral to legal services where appropriate;
3. Completion of legal requirements for the adoptions process;
4. Advisement (or insurance that the agency has advised) of adoptive parents regarding their responsibilities and legal duties;
5. Work with other lawyers and court staff involved in the proceeding; and
6. Preparation of documents and court pleadings and insurance of adherance to the law in such proceedings.[13]

In fulfilling these responsibilities, lawyers act in several capacities: as agency representatives in court and in other public arenas, as counsel to the agency with regard to internal affairs, and as counsel for services related directly to clients.[14] Thus, lawyers are involved in legal consultation to agencies and in the "supervision of the legal aspects of the adoption process."[15]

While judges and lawyers have crucial responsibilities in carrying the adoptions process forward, their tasks are conducted at benchmark points in the process. Social workers carry primary responsibility for the initiation and movement of the adoptions process. Social work roles can best be accounted for through an explanation of the steps in the adoptions process.

After eligibility for adoption is determined social workers are involved in

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[9]In this paper, only agency sponsored adoptions are discussed. The role of lawyers involved in independent adoptions are considerably different and do not usually involve collaboration with the social service system.

[10]Frederick P. O'Connell, "The Adoptions Muddle: A Possible Solution," *New York Law Forum* 15 (1969): 759-776.

[11]Carol Fox et al, "Issues of Collaboration Between Social Workers and Lawyers," (Master's Research Project, University of Southern California, 1978), p. 42.

[12]Ibid., p. 42; Rodney M. Gray, "Adoption and the Legal Profession," *Los Angeles Bar Bulletin* 40 (1964): 103.

[13]National Conference of Lawyers and Social Workers, *Law and Social Work* (Washington, D.C.: National Association of Social Workers, 1973), p. 1-26.

[14]Ibid., and Fox et al, "Issues of Collaboration," p. 43.

[15]Fox et al, "Issues of Collaboration," p. 44.

gathering as much information as possible about the child's background, including health and emotional issues. A social study is undertaken to ascertain the child's particular needs and to project what sort of adoptive family would be most suitable. If the child is in foster care, adoptions workers will also be engaged with the child's adjustment and interaction with that temporary family arrangement. The "matching" process—selecting the most suitable available family for a particular child involves careful social study of both the child and potential parents. Specialized skills are frequently needed in planning matches for children with handicapping conditions. Introducing the child and potential parent(s) is a delicate and emotionally charged situation. If there is agreement to proceed with the adoption plan, the social worker initiates and coordinates the collaborative work leading to placement and confirmation. Increasingly, social workers in adoption agencies offer post-adoptive services and counseling to adoptive families.

For an adoptive placement to be successful, social workers must work effectively in two arenas: (1) direct work with clients and (2) collaborative work with the adoptions system. The social worker must assure that the plans for adoptive placement are appropriately and legally carried out. This phase of system intervention is characterized as "work with others on behalf of clients." [16] Interlocking professional responsibilities are therefore an essential component of effective adoptions practice. A clear perception of and agreement on tasks and roles for each involved profession provides the common ground for effective collaborative work.

Issues and Problems in Collaboration

In addition to the basic issues of role clarity, task agreement and need for understanding of one's own and others' professional mission and role, a variety of problems can impede collaborative work in the adoptions process. Fairly typical problems in collaboration may arise, such as battles for "turf," disagreement regarding case handling, role blurring, or a lack of respect for the profession or individual with whom one is involved. Problems of status, credibility and confidence need careful attention so that they do not disrupt the adoptions process. Development of collaborative skills can often alleviate these problem areas.

An issue inherent in this practice arena is that adoptions workers need to learn to tailor their reports and testimony in ways that are relevant to and which accommodate the decision-making function of the court. It is necessary for social workers to understand legal processes and language, and the legal procedures in which they are involved and through which they must guide potential adoptive parents. For the social worker, the sanctioning process of adoptions is carried out in a host setting—the court—where the social worker moves beyond individual judgement regarding the suitability of a placement to a societal recommendation to legalize parent-child relationships in an adoptive family. Judges need to be persuaded that an adoptive placement is at least no worse a match of parent and child than

[16] Ruth Middleman and Gale Goldberg, *Structuring the Delivery of Social Services* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1974), p. 19.

nature typically metes out and that, given the unique circumstances of each adoption, the most suitable and appropriate placement has been recommended.

Adoptions practice, like all social services, changes with changing societal mores and customs. Adoptions practice may even initiate changes in local customs.[17] For example, increasing emphasis on providing adoptive families for handicapped, minority, older and other "hard to place" children may mean that adoptions workers will recommend placement of a severely handicapped child with adoptive parents who have other natural or adopted children. Such a placement may seem to violate prevalant cultural norms that such children might be "better off in an institutional setting" or that parents "don't know what they are getting into and could not sustain the adoption" or that the child in question "should not enter a home with other children." In such instances, the value judgements and personal ideology of judges and of consulted medical personnel may hold in the decision making process.[18] The adoptions worker is then needed as an advocate for the potential adoptive family. It is possible that adoptive parents may be better prepared for the inclusion of a handicapped child in their home than are biological parents for whom the disability often comes as a shock with accompanying trauma and sense of guilt about the child's disabilities.[19]

Transracial and transcultural adoptions also pose a variety of value laden questions for all professionals involved in the process. Brieland and Lemmon identify the central question in transracial placements as "Is a transracial adoptive placement better than leaving the child to grow up in an institution or series of foster homes?" [20] Clearly a corollory to that question is "What kind of adoptions policies and processes can open greater opportunities for adoption within a child's own culture?" Development of subsidized adoptions programs are one step to make this supportive kind of placement which helps to minimize the "difference" inherent in adoption.

A growing concern in practice and in the literature is the life chances for handicapped or "disturbed" children. The motivation and capabilities of potential adoptive parents to provide supportive homes for such children receives increasing attention. Professionals involved in adoptions must grapple frequently with such delicate and controversial social and political issues. Social workers should assume a primary educative and advocacy role in this area.

A related issue grows out of the assumption that a "good" adoptive family is first of all a family well able to provide for the material needs of the child. While social workers in innovative agencies increasingly seek families on the basis of parenting abilities, it is not unusual for economic concerns to surface in the court. Brieland and Lemmon note: "The court may place more emphasis on economic factors and less on psychological concerns." [21] Cultural and class biases may influence adoptions decisions. For the judiciary, deci-

[17]Christopher Unger, Gladys Dwarshuis and Elizabeth Johnson, *Chaos, Madness and Unpredictability: The Spaulding Approach to Adoption* (Chelsea, Michigan: Spaulding For Children, 1977), pp. 283-293.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Donald Brieland and John Lemmon, Social Work and the Law (St. Paul, Minnesota: West Publishing Company, 1977), p. 409.

[21]Ibid., p. 414.

sion making rests rests on information, values, strengths of recommendations, and assumptions about the merits of the case. Adoption is a social, psychological and legal issue in which judges are likely to consider "community values" as well as their own in making a decision. In each of these value laden areas social workers must serve as the advocates for children and families.

Strategies and Skills

In order for collaborative work to be successful, the professionals involved must be working toward the same general goal and must have fairly similar views of how to achieve the stated goal. If one party is not clear about the goal or if there is disagreement then tactics of persuasion, negotiation or even conflict are called for. These strategies will need to be used with skill and concern for practice outcomes.

Some work situations between professionals move from a collaborative stance to an adversarial one. When this occurs in adoptions, there can be serious consequences for clients. There may be real disagreements among professionals as to the suitability of prospective parents or the adoptability of a particular child. If a judge is asked to make a decision which seems to be contrary to community tradition, generally held values, or his/her own individual values, the decision may be difficult one to make.[22] Social workers, if they are knowledgeable about the court system, can work in a variety of ways to educate or assist judges or court staff in problematic decision areas. If this groundwork is not done and placement is denied, then the adoption process fails or the worker and the agency may have to move to an appeal process—a risky matter in many instances, yet a step that may be needed in order to offer and extend the possibilities of adoption to children who have denied.[23] Collaborative skills can help adoptions workers facilitate the adoption process and can often insure against the failure of the adoption or the need to move to legal challenges to a previous decision.

Recognizing the social and political complexities of adoptions, the Spaulding agency of Michigan, which speciallizes in adoptions for handicapped, older, or other "hard to place" children, has recognized the tremendous importance of collaborative work and strategies of persuasion and negotiation in effecting such placements:

> It is the contention of the Spaulding staff that the successful adoptive placement of older and handicapped children requires workers who aggressively work with judges and court staff on behalf of children to overcome legal hurdles to permanent placement.[24]

In the adoptions process, it is "critical for adoption workers to do their legal, political and psychological homework before they approach the court."[25] Legal homework involves developing knowledge of adoptions

[22]Unger, Chaos, *Madness and Unpredictability*.
[23]Ibid.
[24]Ibid.
[25]Ibid. p. 286.

law and related court systems. There may be many differences in court procedures among counties in the same state and considerable differences among states. A "comfortable working knowledge" of such procedures can aid a worker in assuring that procedures are being carried out appropriately, can prevent delays and can facilitate appropriate decisions.[26] Knowledge of the law can help a worker understand its realistic constraints and locate its points of flexibility. Workers need to understand the differences between statute law, interpretations of statutes, and case law or dictum. Such familiarity with the current law and legal issues under debate can help social workers use the law as a tool to help clients. The Spaulding agency has gone further than most agencies in this regard by training workers in collaborative skills and effective approaches to court work:

> The key to the ability to aggressively defend an appropriate placement decision is the realization that adoption law is a complex mixture of broadly defined procedures, poorly detailed intentions, and all to often uninformed interpretations.[27]

Basic to defending appropriate placement decisions is the utilization of effective communications with other professionals. The social worker must understand both the possible resources and constraints of other agencies. Part of the communication skills needed in collaborative work involve supportive efforts and use of direct influence.[28] As Hollis notes, another important factor in communication in collaborative work is the use of techniques of exploration and problem description as well as "person-situation reflection."[29] The importance of supportive and sustainment techniques seems clear, especially where problematic decisions must be made regarding adoptive placements. Direct influence needs to be used increasingly in adoptions practice as workers seek placement for children in non-traditional situations and for children who have been considered "unadoptable." Methods of exploration and "person-situation reflection" can be useful in the educative process of developing knowledge within the court and legal systems about current adoptions practice. Where a judge is faced with a decision which seems to go against community tradition, it will be helpful for the worker to provide strong, logical and supportive reasons why this decision can responsibly by made.

Social workers need to recognize, as Unger, Dwarshuis and Johnson point out, "that their personal efforts, supported by logic, knowledge of the law, and placement practice alternatives, could produce desirable changes in a judge's attitude and specific action beneficial to children."[30] Greater attention frequently needs to be given to the careful preparation of reports and recommendations, especially where the adoptive plan is in any way out of the ordinary. Workers need to sharpen skills in presentation of cases both orally and in writing. Discussion of precedents or of successful comparable adoptions may aid judges in making decisions in problematic cases.

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[26]Ibid. p. 287.
[27]Ibid. p. 287.
[28]Florence Hollis, *Casework: A Psychosocial Therapy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Random House, 1972), Chapter 9.
[29]Ibid.
[30]Unger, *Chaos, Madness and Unpredictability*, p. 287.

While the Spaulding Agency's program presents an excellent instance of an innovative and progressive approach to adoptions services, its successful work with children often considered "unadoptable" clears a path which many more adoptions agencies will need to follow as the population of adoptable children increasingly becomes a group which is older, frequently minority, and often handicapped or troubled by behavior problems or traumatic early childhoods. The Spaulding experience in developing an aggressive model to provide services for children will need to be expanded to broaden the opportunities for adoption for "hard to place" children.

Part of the collaborative work needed is attention to developing and fostering adoptions system contacts and system supports. Developing good and continuous relationships with the court is one means of demonstrating competence and establishing the credibility needed when difficult cases arise. It would be helpful to locate in each court one particular person who can act as liaison for the adoption agency and assist in interpretation of issues.[31] It seems that social work has been hesitant to use its powers of influence despite the fact that all helping professions are essentially systems of interpersonal influence. Where social work has the knowledge, skill and practice competence to plan for adoptions, it should not shrink from the exercise of influence to complete and sanction that process. Such an effort is basically an advocacy approach to adoptions wherein a worker can apply current social and psychological knowledge to the decision making process and, if needed, can lay out the "legal alternatives to the child's current placement plan."[32]

Adoptions workers and agencies also need to develop their bases of community support, particularly in times of a rapidly changing practice where some adoptions approaches may seem controversial. Community support from adoptive parents, professionals and concerned citizens can build a base of support for agencies which can make it easier for a judge to decide for placement in non-traditional adoption recommendations.[33] Where the effectiveness argument has not held—i.e., the need of children to have permanency in a family situation—the efficiency argument may prevail—contrasting the costs of adoption, even subsidized adoption, with the costs of institutional care for children.[34]

As part of the political and psychological homework needed for effective adoptions work, social workers should understand the procedures for election or appointment of the judges with whom they collaborate. Knowledge of the judge's individual legal philosophy and general perspective on adoptions is an aid in deciding how to present the issues of a particular case in a manner that is relevant and compelling.[35] Where there are avenues such as special conferences or symposia to expand communication with lawyers and judges, it is wise to take them. Such meetings can aid in identifying common goals and concerns of professionals involved in different aspects of the adoptions process; they may also help social workers to realize that both the courts and laws are fabricated systems which grow and change, and that the law is not an inexorable machine.

[31] Ibid. p. 288
[32] Ibid. p. 288
[33] Ibid. p. 288-289
[34] Ibid. p. 289
[35] Ibid.

Bureaucracy, Bureaucrats, Bureaucratic Change and You

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Most adoption workers view themselves as change agents and tend to reject the notion that they are bureaucrats, working in formal agency settings, subject to a variety of hierarchical controls.[1] At the same time, adoptions occur largely in formal agency settings. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that practitioners have difficulty believing that *all* work routines exist for the benefit of clients.

People who work in such areas as child welfare commonly express a strong commitment to serving the needs of clients. However, the degree to which such idealism and commitment can be maintained, overtime, often is a product of the congruence that exists between the individual needs of clients and organizational demands. For example, because adoption workers often mediate between undeniable human suffering and agency categories of response, a high degree of role conflict can occur. Further, under conditions of declining resources, line workers must struggle with problems of "too many things to do" as their organizations seek to achieve quality services with fewer resources. Not surprisingly, until an agency can achieve a new balance by contracting, rather than through growth, managerial decisions regarding what the organization can do and do well, frequently lag behind workers' need to adjust and reallocate scarce service time to a variety of case situations. Such environmental conditions frustrate some persons; other employees perceive such situations as a violation of professional commitments.

Adoption practitioners in agency settings respond in a variety of ways to those aspects of the job environment which are perceived as a constraint on practice with clients. For example, Bensman and Rosenberg attribute the myth of incompetence cherished by line workers about higher officials to be the product of feelings of impersonality, isolation, and powerlessness experienced in many settings.[2] The extreme responses of "over-conformity" or "rebellion" are commonly suggested by authors as other ways of responding to formal organizations.[3] However, alternative responses between these extremes are possible when one views organizations as *social* entities, characterized by purposeful, goal-oriented activity. Such a stance incorporates the notion that individual-organizational adaptation is a two-way reciprocal process of influence requiring adaptation of the individual as well as the organization.[4]

The purpose of this article is to examine the role of adoption workers as organizational change agents. However, change occurs within an agency

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[1]See for example, Robert Pruger, "The Good Bureaucrat," *Social Work*, 18 (July 1973): 26-32; Wilbur Finch Jr., "Social Workers versus Bureaucracy," *Social Work*, 21 (September 1976): 370-375.

[2]Joseph Bensman and Bernard Rosenberg, "The Meaning of Work in a Bureaucratic Society," ed. Amitai Etzioni, *Readings on Modern Organizations* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1969), pp. 61-62.

[3]See for example, Andrew Billingsley, "Bureaucratic and Professional Orientation Patterns in Social Casework," *Social Service Review*, 38 (December 1964): 400-407.

[4]Lyman W. Porter, Edward E. Lawler, and J. Richard Hackman, *Behavior in Organizations* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1975), p. 161.

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context which can either support or limit the success of worker interventions. For this reason, consideration of both the parameters of change which exist for lower level members of agencies, as well as the organizational climate in which change occurs must be part of any such analysis. Two questions will be addressed: (1) when, and under what circumstances might adoption workers initiate and participate in change strategies within formal agency settings?, and (2) what conditions in the work environment are likely to encourage or constrain individual change efforts?

Adoption Workers as Change Agents:

A fundamental characteristic of social agencies is that the members use the organization for their own needs. Perrow argues:

> As users, we are all prone to ask . . . organizations to be more goal oriented (to our own goals), efficient (for us, in terms of the resources we put in) and rational (in terms of our own interests only) than they can ever be.[5]

If social organizations are viewed as resources for a variety of persons or groups, it is necessary to recognize that those who control a larger share of the resources will exercise more power in critical agency decisions. At the same time, such a perspective should not suggest that line practitioners are without an ability to influence innovation in ways that are supportive of their professional goals and values. However, the sources of their power, rather than deriving from an agency position, are more often the product of knowledge and skill as well as their social attractiveness to others. Thus, the cultivation and management of influence within formal settings is a prerequisite for successfully fulfilling a change agent role.

What are the sources of power for adoption practitioners working in a formal agency setting? The two variables of knowledge and time appear to most often explain the ability of some adoption workers to influence agency innovation. Knowledge and skill in direct practice with clients, while an essential component of worker expertise, however, is insufficient to successfully fulfill a change agent role. A knowledge of organizational structure, work process and the social interdependencies which comprise the agency environment, are critical sources of information which allow the worker to perform his job in a reasonable manner. For example, a familiarity with agency policies and procedures provides a basis for negotiating change which will assure a continued serving of the agency's mission. Further, a knowledge of social interdependencies often provides the basis for negotiating informal access to resources, allowing the worker to increase services to others.[6] In this way, the individual becomes a more valued actor in group efforts.

A knowledge of the organization and structure of work provides critical information regarding the impact of current arrangements upon profes-

[5]Charles Perrow, "Demystifying Organizations," ed. Rosemary C. Sarri and Yeheskel Hasenfeld, *The Management of Human Services* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 118.

[6]David Mechanic, "Sources of Power of Lower Participants in Complex Organizations," ed. Bernard L. Hinton and Joseph Reitz, *Groups and Organizations* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1971), p. 494.

sional practice and the modifications that may be needed to support professional goals. For example, Brager argues that an insensitivity to structural factors often results in practitioners relying too heavily upon exhortation as a strategy of change and too little on promoting adjustments in work patterns.[7]

In addition to a knowledge of the organization, a special kind of expertness is required. Often such expertness is not a product of professional education, per se. Instead, it may involve a special ability to work with particular types of clients that makes a specific worker unique and, therefore, difficult to replace. Mechanic refers to such a special expertness in terms of interest and effort.[8] The more effort individual persons are willing to exert in a specific area, the greater will be their influence in that area. Thus, when higher officials retain interest in such areas but are unwilling to devote comparable time to it, the practitioner's power is increased.

As a second source of power, longevity in an organization can increase an individual's access to persons, information and resources. However, time, per se, is insufficient. Practitioners must be guided by a vision of what is possible, as well as to be willing to work toward change over sufficient time to realize its accomplishment.[9]

In addition, mastery of a job appears to be a prerequisite to a successful change-agent role. For example, experiential data obtained from the provision of services can be a major contributor to change efforts when they are organized and codified by adoption workers and used to document the need for change. However, attending to the needs of clients can easily absorb available time unless social change is a firmly established priority.[10]

Adoption practitioners are members of a unit in a department that is part of a larger organization. From a social influence perspective, such line workers, or change agents, will have their greatest impact upon those with whom they interrelate. In other words, the smaller the area to be changed and the closer adoption workers are to be change target, the more influential they are likely to be. Similarly, the more modest the change being sought, the greater is the likelihood of success.[11] Despite the real limitations which exist for practitioners seeking change, however, many adoption workers settle for far less than is possible. In part, this may reflect a lack of recognition that agreement about change can be developed if potential allies are identified an educated around the reasons for change. In contrast, when basic disagreement exists, and opposition to the change is evident, additional resources and more complex strategies may be necessary.

The Social Context of Change:

The interventions of adoption workers usually occur within an "organizational climate" or context that can either stimulate or inhibit change efforts.

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[7]George Brager, "Institutional Change: Perimeters of the Possible," *Social Work*, 12 (January 1967): 63.
[8]Mechanic, "Sources of Power," p. 492.
[9]Pruger, "Good Bureaucrat," p. 27.
[10]Brager, "Sources of Power."
[11]Roland L. Warren, *Social Change and Human Purpose* (Chicago: Rand McNally College Publishing Co., 1977).

Bureaucratic organizations are commonly characterized as rigid and unresponsive to the needs of individuals. For example, because such settings often respond to partialized problems, compassion for the total individual and his needs is frequently absent from organizational consideration.[12] However, such a perspective of agency life can obscure the dynamic nature of work and the potential for change which can exist. An alternative perspective offers a more useful basis for considering change. In this view, formal settings are seen as dynamic, ever changing, and adapting to situations, thus requiring the continual adjustment of individual, group and organization to each other as well as to an external environment.

All social situations change over a period of time. Sometimes the impetus for altering present arrangements involves an individual in an organization. At other times, a community may seek change and a different organizational response. Warren differentiates between purposive and increasing or growing change—the former involving change which is sought and the latter change which occurs independent of an individual's efforts.[13] As Warren has suggested, "One person's purposive change" becomes another person's experience.[14] To seek change, therefore, is to intervene in an already existing flow of events, influenced by the diverse, sometimes contradictory, goals of other individuals and groups. Not surprisingly, the accomplishments achieved under such circumstances may differ from the initial change goal of an individual actor.

Individuals, in isolation, rarely achieve significant change within organizational settings. Usually, this is because an altering of events involves the modification of established relationships as well as the expectations or belief's which people hold about certain causes in the work environment bringing certain effects. Both individuals and groups can resist change efforts. For these reasons, other individuals and groups must be considered and enlisted in a change effort. For example, when change is perceived as potentially disruptive to established relationships, or when professional beliefs held by individuals define the change as undesirable, it is unlikely that help will be volunteered. Often, people who benefit from existing arrangements or job status are unwilling to relinquish these for what is perceived to be less desirable conditions. Finally, the possibility that a proposed change is of questionable benefit to the majority of individuals, groups, or the organization as a whole, cannot be excluded from consideration.

A knowledge of when, and under what circumstances, agency employees are receptive to change often can assist the adoption change agent to identify potential allies. Research suggests that, under some circumstances, individuals in organizational settings welcome rather than resist change. For example, Brager has noted that "like-minded" individuals are more receptive to determined and concentrated effort to achieve change.[15] In addition,

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[12]See for example, Victor Thompson, *Without Sympathy or Enthusiasm: The Problem of Administrative Compassion* (University: The University of Alabama Press, 1975).

[13]Warren, *Social Change*, pp. 9-10.

[14]Ibid. p. 9.

[15]Brager, "Sources of Power," p. 62.

newly organized groups are more likely to be innovative than are those whose relationships have been established over a period of time. Finally, professionals in fields which are rapidly expanding, as opposed to the contracting nature of social work practice in many settings today, can more easily afford to risk change efforts.[16]

The nature of the jobs which individuals hold often determine receptivity to change. For example, Blau found that the existence of irritating difficulties can generate positive attitudes towards innovations which will remove such irritants.[17] Similarly, adoption workers who have mastered their job assignments often welcome changes which will make their work more interesting. Not surprisingly, new programs and policies which require the expansion of an agency's program often find support among organizational members.[18]

On the other hand, agency work can breed rigidity and an unwillingness on the part of some employees to consider changes in programs and procedures. For example, when workers are fearful of supervisory criticism, or are unknowledgable about existing procedures, resistance to change often can be expected.[19] In a study of public welfare employees, for example, Blau found that new workers provide clients with fewer services because they lack knowledge of agency procedures and rules and, therefore, focus almost exclusively on determining whether clients have met eligibility requirements.[20] In contrast, older practitioners, who continue beyond their initial three years of employment, do not become more rigid or develop a lack of interest in helping clients; instead, they tend to place greater emphasis on providing services. These findings suggest that the amount of energy involved in learning new job roles diminishes interest in change. Further, where individuals lack peer support or are relatively isolated from other members of the organization, a similar disinterest in change will be evident.

Finally, agencies vary in responsiveness to change. A number of characteristics are frequently associated with the willingness to search for new arrangements or innovations. Hage and Aiken, for example, identify agency size and the amount of time clients spend within the setting as positively correlated with change.[21] Similarly, greater participation of staff in resource allocation decisions, as well as greater heterogeniety of staff in terms of their perceptions of the causes of client problems, are correlated with a more rapid rate of change. However, a centralized decision-making structure is not necessarily resistant to change. Centralization can offer both the ability to select and reinforce innovation as well as the capability of resisting change efforts.[22]

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[16]Ibid. p. 63.

[17]Peter M. Blau, "Bureaucracy and Social Change," ed. Oscar Grusky and George A. Miller, *The Sociology of Organizations* (New York: The Free Press, 1970), p. 257.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Ibid. p. 258.

[20]Peter M. Blau, "Orientation Toward Clients in a Public Welfare Agency, ed. Peter Blau, *On the Nature of Organizations* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1974), pp. 170-186.

[21]Jerald Hage and Michael Aiken, *Social Change in Complex Organizations* (New York: Random House, 1970.).

[22]Ronald G. Corwin, "Strategies for Organizational Innovation," ed. Y. Hasenfeld and Richard English, *Human Service Organizations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974), p. 716.

Clearly, when agency members can find agreement on the objectives to be achieved, and the strategies to be used in seeking innovation, the sabotage of change efforts is less likely to occur. Brager, in defining the parameters of possible change, states that informed opinion, the sanction of respectability, and especially time for new ideas to become familiar are important in promoting change.[23] However, both costs and benefits can be expected from innovative efforts. For example, when such changes alter an adoption agency's activities in ways that can affect the contributions demanded from members, a marked increase in the dissatisfaction of some persons commonly occurs.[24] As previously noted, innovative accomplishments often differ from the intended purpose sought by some adoption workers in a change agent role. Even when agreed upon and desired innovation occurs, disruptive and negative effects on social relationships among members of the organization are common results.[25] Change, then, is a necessary, and continuous, interactive process in organizations. However, innovation can be expected to have both beneficial and disruptive effects upon the nature of work because of the social and interdependent nature of organizational life. Some modification of existing relationships is a common result of change.

Summary:

When social welfare agencies are perceived as *social* entities, involving the continuous adaptation of both the individual and the organization, line practitioners emerge as important actors, capable of influencing administrative choices, as well as being supportive of change efforts. While a number of sources of influence can be developed and managed by line workers, the organizational context emerges as an intervening variable, capable of supporting or resisting innovation. The acquisition of special knowledge and time to achieve desired change are key ingredients to the successful fulfillment of a change role by adoption workers within agency settings.

[23]Brager, "Sources of Power," p. 60.
[24]J. G. March and H. A. Simon, *Organizations* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1958), p. 84.
[25]Hage and Aiken, *Social Change*, p. 53.